Confidence in God

Alexander Carson

Confidence in God

Alexander Carson

http://www.servantofmessiah.org

Confidence in God in Times of Danger

A Study of God's Providence in the Book of Esther

Alexander Carson (1776-1844)

CONTENTS

Introduction

1. Events Used for the Deliverance of the Jews

a. The Feast
b. Vashti's Bold Defiance
c. Esther's Elevation to Queen
d. Mordecai's Elevation to Authority

2. Events Used to Bring the Jews to the Brink of Ruin

a. Haman's Promotion
b. Mordecai's Refusal to Honor Haman
c. Esther's Concealment of Her Nationality
d. The King's Commandment

3. Events Used for the Deliverance of God's People

a. Haman's Lots
b. Haman's Delay
c. Esther's Approach
d. Mordecai's Arguments
e. Esther's Reception
f. Esther's Delay
g. Mordecai's Exaltation
h. Haman's Fall

4. An Inspired Record

a. Internal Evidence
b. No Human Gratification
c. The Authority of the Canon

d. The Name of God
e. Not Quoted in the New Testament
f. Questioning the Canon
g. Philosophy

5. Valuable Instruction

a. The Hand of God in the Affairs of Men
b. Enduring Persecution
c. Regulation of Zeal
d. Avoiding Nominal Christianity
e. Human Responsibility and Divine Sovereignty

Short Biography of Alexander Carson

http://servantofmessiah.org/

Confidence in God in Times of Danger

Introduction

The great design of the *Book of* Esther in the Holy Scriptures is to display the wisdom, providence, and power of God in the preservation of His people and in the destruction of their enemies. We learn from it that the most casual events which take place in the affairs of the world are connected with His plans respecting His people, and that the most trifling things are appointed and directed by Him to effect His purposes. It decides a question that philosophy has conversed for ages and will never fathom; recording a number of events as the result of man's free will—yet evidently appointed of God and directed by His providence. From this book the believer may learn to place unbounded confidence in the care of his God in the utmost danger, and to look to the Lord of omnipotence for deliverance when there is no apparent means of escape. It demonstrates a particular providence, in the minutest things, and affords the most solid answer to all the objections of philosophy about this consoling truth.

The wisdom of this world, with all its acuteness, is not able to perceive how God can interfere on any particular occasion without deranging the order of His general plans. Philosophers account for the prosperity of the wicked, and the afflictions of the righteous, from the operation of general "laws." A villain grows rich by industry, and oppresses the virtuous poor; a rich man loses his all by a storm at sea, or is himself overwhelmed in the ruins of an earthquake. In all this, the philosopher's "god" cannot interfere, for he is tied down by the order of a general providence. He is fettered by his own previously established laws, as effectually as the gods of the heathen were when they swore by the river Styx.[1]He must quietly look on amidst all the occasional mischief resulting from his plans, which, though upon the whole the best possible, yet have many unavoidable defects. Storms and earthquakes result from the operations of general laws established at first by the Author of nature; and the Almighty, it is supposed, without unsuitably counteracting the order appointed by Himself, can neither prevent them nor deliver from their dreadful consequences. Famine and war, with all the evils that destroy or afflict men, are accounted for on principles that exclude a particular providence. The arrogance of the oppressor cannot be restrained, nor the sufferings of the virtuous prevented, without an unbecoming deviation from the order of nature. Philosophy cannot see how her god could dispose every particular event without a miracle on every occasion of interference. On this supposition, she thinks that he must be continually suspending and counteracting the general laws which he at first established for the government of the world.

How different from this philosophic god is the Lord God of the Bible! Jehovah has indeed established general laws in the government of the world, yet in such a manner that He is the *immediate*[2]*Author* of every particular event. His power has been sometimes displayed in suspending these laws, but is *usually* employed in directing them to fulfill His particular purposes. The sun and the rain minister to the nourishment and comfort equally of the righteous and the wicked, not from the necessity of general laws, but from the immediate providence of Him Who, in the government of the world, wills this result. Accordingly, the shining of the sun and the falling of the rain on the fields of the wicked are represented in Scripture, not as the unavoidable effects of general laws, but as the design of supreme goodness. A fowling-piece[3]well aimed will strike a particular object, but divine truth has assured us that a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without the permission of the Ruler of the world.

This book (Esther) teaches us that God exerts His particular providence in an inconceivably wise and

skillful manner, even by the operation of His general laws and the exercise of the free determinations of men. The very laws that, in the opinion of the philosopher, stand in the way of a particular providence are here exhibited as the agents that He deputes to effect His purposes. The most astonishing interferences that ever were recorded are here effected solely through the operation of general laws and the actions of voluntary agents. The people of God are delivered out of the most imminent danger, and their enemies most marvelously overturned, without a single miracle. The glory of the divine wisdom, power, and providence shines here the more illustriously, because God effects His work *without* suspending the laws of nature, or constraining the determination of the agents employed in the execution of His work. Had the earth opened and swallowed the enemies of the Jews, the power of Jehovah would have been displayed; but when He saved them by a train of events according to the general laws of nature—each of which separately viewed seems fortuitous, yet when seen in combination must necessarily have been designed to bring about the one great end[4]—[then] the existence of a particular providence is proved, and the nature of it is delightfully illustrated. It is not merely taught in doctrine, but it is exhibited in *example*.

In the history of the deliverance of the Jews through the exaltation of Esther we have *the whole history of the world in miniature.* The *Book of Esther* is the "history of providence." In the inspired account that we have here of an interesting portion of Jewish history, we have an alphabet, through the judicious use of which we may read all the events of every day, age, and nation. This is a divine key that will open all the mysteries of providence. It is God's commentary on all that He has done and all that man has done since the finishing of the works of creation. All is natural and seemingly fortuitous; yet, if the whole had been a work of mere fiction for amusement, the events could not have been better adapted to the end. There is all the simplicity of nature, yet all the surprise and interest of romance. The grand object is evolved like the plot of a regular drama; every event recorded contributes its influence in producing the effect. There is nothing wanting; there is nothing superfluous. Had the most trifling incident refused its aid, the whole plan would have been deranged—the most fatal results would have succeeded. From the first to the last, all parts are connected and influenced like the machinery of a watch. By a thousand wheels the mainspring guides the index.

We have 1) first, a train of events to raise up deliverance to the Jews, even before they were brought into danger. 2) Next, we have a train of events to bring them to the brink of ruin. 3) Then following, the surprising means of their preservation and the destruction of their enemies. To one or other of the objects, every circumstance recorded in the history contributes, and the whole forms one of the grandest displays of the wisdom, power, and providence of God that is to be met with in the Scriptures. It is well calculated to represent that noble plan by which the kingdom of Satan is overturned, and God's people are delivered from the power of their great enemy, through the very means intended for their utter extirpation.

1. Events Used for the Deliverance of the Jews

In reviewing the train of events that provided the means of deliverance for the Jewish nation, before they were brought into danger, the first thing that presents itself is the great feast of Ahasuerus. At first sight nothing could have been more unconnected with the intended object. It is quite a fortuitous and ordinary matter. A royal revel would appear calculated to defeat the designs of Jehovah, rather than to fulfill them. But the wisdom and omnipotence of Jehovah can use ordinary events by a worldly assembly, or even a synagogue of Satan, as well as by a church of Christ. *He reigns as absolutely over His enemies as among His friends.* He works through Satan and his emissaries, as well as through the ministry of the angels of His presence; and employs the councils of sinners, as well as the loyal and loving exertions of saints. The occasion of originating this deliverance to the people of God was a feast to exhibit the glory of a worldly kingdom, and not a religious assembly. God employs His agents in works suitable to their character! Had the wisdom of men formed the plan of deliverance, the monarch would have been made a proselyte to the religion of the Jews, and the work would have been effected by him as a servant of the God of Israel. But God does every thing by him while he continues, as far as we are informed, altogether uninfluenced by the law of the Lord of heaven. Had David sat on the throne of Persia, his zeal for the preservation of Israel and destruction of their enemies could not have flamed with greater ardor[5]than that of Ahasuerus.

a. The Feast

What was the particular occasion of this feast we are not informed, and therefore it can be in no way useful for our edification. Commentators are usually very obliging with their conjectures on such an emergency, and edify us with many a shrewd guess. But it is the duty of a Christian to learn everything that the Scriptures record; and it is equally his duty to remain in the most obstinate ignorance of everything they do not reveal. Whether this was a birthday, or a feast for commemorating the accession to the throne; whether it was an annual festival, or an occasional revel—I know not; I care not. What I know is that God had evidently determined it as a link of the wonderful concatenation[6]of ordinary events employed by Him to effect His glorious purpose of delivering His people. Though the free appointment of man, it was also the appointment of God. It was necessary to give birth to the events that followed.

The whimsical, tyrannical, and indecent thought that struck the mind of the monarch in his wine, though originating with himself, was according to the appointment of a wise Providence. Why did such a thought come into his mind? It was evidently contrary to the custom of Persia for Vashti to make such an appearance, as the females on this occasion feasted apart. It was extremely indecorous for the female majesty of the empire to be exposed to the formal survey of such an assembly, heated with wine. The queen's disobedience of the orders of an absolute monarch, accustomed to universal obedience, shows how much the thing required was contrary to the general sentiments of decorum. Had such a thing been usual, it would not have been so offensive to the queen. It may be said it was a drunken frolic. But was the king never drunk before? Is this the only time that he acted under the influence of wine? Why did the thought strike him now rather than at any other time of his drinking? Why is it that this is the only instance of the kind on record? God's intention undoubtedly was that a thing might be enjoined on the queen with which she would not comply, so that her disgrace might make way for the exaltation of the deliverer of His people. Yet, though in one point of view it was the appointment of God, in another it was

the result of the actions of free and voluntary agents.

God's purpose is brought about by those whose only view is to fulfill *their own* purposes. How inscrutable are the mysteries of Providence! How unsearchable are His counsels in the government of the world! Men are His enemies; they hate Him and disobey Him—yet in all their plans and actions *they fulfill His will.* The regularity of the heavenly bodies in their courses is wonderful, but they are not voluntary agents—they are constantly urged on by the hand of their Creator. But men think, resolve, and act for themselves; yet *they* fulfill the plans of Jehovah as much as the sun, moon, and stars. His very enemies in opposing Him are made the instruments of serving Him. How consoling to the believer is this view of Providence! When he looks around him, he sees everywhere men trampling on the laws of God, and openly putting dishonor on Him. Is God disappointed in the end that He proposed by His works? Is He really overcome and thwarted by the prince of darkness? No! Jehovah is executing His purposes even through the wickedness of men and devils. All things that have taken place from the Creation must minister to His glory.

Though Satan has usurped the throne of God in the world for so many thousand years, yet in all this God has been executing His own plans, and He *now* rules on earth as absolutely and as unreservedly as He does in heaven. This is a depth that we cannot fathom; but it is a truth necessary for the honor of the character of God, and one of which the Scriptures leave no room for doubt. The sin and misery that are on the earth, the endless perdition of wicked men and devils, are subjects of melancholy consideration to the man of God; but let him be consoled with the thought that Jehovah worketh *all* things according to the counsel of His own will, and that the darkest spots on the Book of God may appear in the brightness of meridian light in the world of glory. "The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil" (Pro 16:4). The Apostle Paul declares that he was a "sweet savour unto God," as well "in those that perish" as "in those that are saved" (2Co 2:15). A fool may ask, How can these things be so? and the wisest man on earth cannot answer him. But is it not enough that *God* has said it? Shall little children receive the word of their parents with the utmost confidence of conviction when they testify the most incredible things, and shall we hesitate to receive the Word of the God of truth?

b. Vashti's Bold Defiance

The queen's refusal is another providential circumstance that we are here called to observe and to admire. Notwithstanding the singularity, indelicacy, and unreasonableness of the command, it is remarkable that the queen should venture to disobey a despot[7]heated with wine. She could scarcely expect to escape with impunity. Even Esther herself, with all her surpassing beauty, was exceedingly reluctant to venture uncalled into his presence. She was not willing to risk her life on his caprice, whether he would hold out his golden scepter or suffer her to perish in her rashness. What, then, must have been the danger of Vashti? What must have been the intrepidity[8]of the daring woman that refused to obey him? Her conduct was singularly bold and imprudent. Her resolution was no doubt suggested by her pride, or by her sense of decorum; but a regard to self-interest is usually stronger than these principles, especially in courts. Why, then, did her delicacy at this time prevail over her prudence? Not one woman in a thousand would have acted in this manner in the same circumstances. Why then did a woman of such spirit fill the situation of queen at this critical moment? Why was not her beauty accompanied with an abject spirit of servility, as is usually the case among slaves of Eastern despots? The reason evidently is, *God* had provided this high-spirited woman for the occasion that He meant to serve by her. He had determined her character and conduct as the means of executing His purposes. By the ordinary course of events, His providence had given a consort[9]to the monarch who was fitted for the part which He designed that she should act. As a voluntary agent she ignorantly fulfilled the will of Him Whom she

knew not, when she was influenced solely by a regard to her own feelings.

The *advice of the king's counselors* on this occasion is also remarkable. The sycophants[10]around despots are generally distinguished for caution. Even in their revels they are seldom off their guard. Now it was at the utmost hazard that they gave this advice. They must succeed, or fall. Though pure love could not influence the breast of a licentious Eastern monarch, yet it is evident that Ahasuerus admired the beauty of his queen. The favorite mistress of despots is known to prevail against the most subtle and most powerful ministers. We see how readily this very monarch gave up to Esther the man whom he most singularly honored and raised above all the princes of the empire. If the counselors of the king should fail in displacing Vashti from the affections of their master, they were evidently planning their own ruin. Had the king refused to listen to their counsel, and the queen been restored again to power, their overthrow was certain. Why, then, did not the subtle statesmen take the wisest course, and make their court to the queen by interceding for her pardon? After all the provocation of the king by the queen's disobedience, it was still possible that a man who admired her beauty, and had provoked her transgression, might not instantly put it out of his power to forgive her. She might have been disgraced in such a way as not to prevent her restoration, on repentance. Such a bold step in the ministers of a despot is certainly remarkable. But whatever might influence them, *God had determined* their counsel as the means of fulfilling His own.

That *the king* should subject her to a temporary degradation or disgrace, even though his own improper command was the occasion in her transgression, is very natural; but that, for the cold-hearted purpose of setting an example to the wives of the empire, he could consent to give up forever one whom he so much admired, discovers more stoicism[11]than is generally to be found in absolute monarchs. Their treatment of their wives is usually more influenced by passion than by a view to public good. In the heat of his fury, it would have been less strange that he should have given orders for her death, that he should divorce her for an example to the wives of his subjects. Yet, to the frigid morality of his wise men does this Eastern sensualist sacrifice his beautiful queen. By a harsh decree she is divorced forever. But this great feast, this capricious command, this imprudent disobedience, this rash advice, this unfeeling consent, this sacrifice of affection to policy, this harsh decree, are all necessary in the plans of Providence. Vashti must be removed, so that Esther may be exalted to her place.

c. Esther's Elevation to Queen

Let us next contemplate the elevation of a poor fatherless Jewess to the rank of queen of the Persian empire, and admire the wonderful providence of God in her destination. Is there any man so blind as not to perceive that it was entirely providential that one of the small number of captive Jews should be found more beautiful than all the virgins of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? Can any one question that God gave her that exquisite loveliness for the very occasion? Known unto God are all His ways from the beginning; and in the formation of Hadassah (Esther's Hebrew name), He had an eye to the plan that He intended to execute through her. Had not God provided a Jewess of beauty surpassing all the virgins of the Persian dominion, the previous events would have been useless. Esther was found the most lovely of women, that through her beauty she might deliver the people of God.

Giftedness

In this circumstance we have a key to the divine procedure in adjusting the various events in providence to the fulfilling of His plans and declaration with respect to the kingdom of His Son. All the persons who are called to take a part in the advancement or defense of the cause of God are gifted by

Him with the necessary qualifications. Many of these qualifications are given in their birth or education, though they may not for a length of time be called to use them. Sometimes they may even for years employ them in opposition to God. Such was the case with Paul, and, doubtless, some points of the character of this eminent Apostle were bestowed on him, in his very constitution, with a view to the service of Christ. He had many things by immediate gift, but he had some things by mental temperament and education. Any one who reads the history of the Reformation with an eye to this characteristic in divine Providence will see it surprisingly illustrated in innumerable instances.

The character and circumstances of Luther[12]alone will afford a multitude of such providential provisions. By a single gift was Esther fitted to be the deliverer of Israel; by a multitude of talents and acquirements, in the most wonderful complexity, was Luther fitted for the work to which he was called by God. Indeed, the history of the Reformation bears a very striking resemblance to this deliverance of the Jews. Without a single miracle, God wrought a deliverance as surprising as the preservation of Israel, and many of those employed to effect it were as ignorant of God as the king of Persia. He used the passions and the interests of worldly men in bringing about His purposes, as well as the love and zeal of His own people. The preservation of the cause and people of God at that period was as much the work of divine Providence as the deliverance of the Jews from the destruction to which they were destined by the wicked Haman.

All the learning, ability, and acquirements—the riches, birth, rank, and influence, through which at any time the cause of God has been served—have been conferred by God, in His providential government, to fulfill the purposes of His grace. Not only does He gift His own people for this end, but many who belong not to any of the tribes of Israel have been made hewers of wood and drawers of water for the service of the temple (Jos 9:23). Many able defenses of the Scriptures, many satisfactory vindications of their doctrines and illustrations of their contents, have been afforded by Providence through the instrumentality of men as ignorant of the true grace of God as they who deny their authenticity. The very ravens are made to feed the people of God, rather than that they should want[13] (1Ki 17:4).

Mystery

In God's conferring on Esther this exquisite beauty, so that He might raise her to royal rank and to influence over the throne itself, we may see that the very thing may, in one point of view, be *the divine appointment*, and in another may be *the sinful actions of men*. This is a doctrine clearly taught us in the Scriptures. It is here exemplified in the government of Providence. It is a truth, however, that the wisdom of this world cannot fathom, and therefore cannot receive. That God should in any sense *appoint*, or intend to bring about, what He has in His Word *forbidden,* is indeed one of the deep things of God. It is the abhorrence of the wise, while many—even of those who have professed to have become fools that they may be wise—in effect deny it by their explanations. But this is a doctrine that the wisdom of men will never penetrate; it is a depth that human intellect will never be able to fathom! Who can by searching find out God? Can nothing be true of Him and His ways *but what is to be comprehended* by such worms as men? Is it not enough to command our belief, that *God* has said it? Is he not virtually an atheist who requires more?

Ability to comprehend

A Christian who rests the reception of the divine testimony on his ability to comprehend the thing testified is more inconsistent than a deist.[14]One who recommends any truth of Scripture on such

grounds insults God. The voice of Providence combines with that of Scripture in testifying to the truth of the doctrine to which I have referred. God evidently provided the beautiful Hadassah for the bed of Ahasuerus. But does the Holy One approve of this connection? Are the seraglios[15]of sensualists according to His Word? Does the divine Law sanction the divorce of Vashti for such an offense? What can be more abominable in the eyes of God than *this* manner of choosing a queen? What could be more hurtful to the interests of men, or more repugnant to their feelings? How unreasonable that a brutal sensualist should possess all the beauty of his vast empire? How many of the fairest females were thus lost to society and consigned to perpetual misery in the palace of the sensual despot? Can anything be more palpably[16]contrary to the end of marriage, not only as it is declared in the Word of God, but even as it has been understood by heathens? *Yet God performedHis purpose through* this great wickedness of men! He has no share in human guilt, while the transgressors of His Law are made to *fulfill His purposes.* Such wisdom is too wonderful for us, it is high, we cannot reach it. But it is God's wisdom; let us receive it with submission.

Events and God's instruments

We may here see also the way in which God regulates the events in His providence for fulfilling His plans by adapting them to the instruments that He intends to employ in their execution. It was beauty that He gave to Esther, because beauty only could be the means of her elevation. All other accomplishments would have utterly failed. Had God given Esther greater riches than any subject of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces, she would not have been a single step nearer the throne. Had she been the daughter of the most powerful man in Persia, or a person of the highest birth, God, in His providence, could have made her a convert or a friend to the religion of the Jews—but this would not have forwarded her progress to the throne. Had she possessed all the wisdom of Solomon or all the accomplishments of her sex, with the exception of beauty, she might as well have been an idiot or a rustic. Personal beauty only could raise her, and personal beauty the God of providence gave her so that she might be raised. This affords a key to God's plan in His providence by which He governs a world that is at enmity with Him. In this way He makes them obey His will who know Him not, who hate Him, and, what is still more strange, even while *they fulfill His will* and transgress His laws. How unsearchable are the counsels of Jehovah! His way is in the sea, and His path in the great waters, and His footsteps are not known.

The providence of God appears conspicuous even in the ignorance of Mordecai and Hadassah. A marriage with a heathen was forbidden to the Jews. Now, had Mordecai and his kinswoman known their duty, her exaltation could never have taken place. But it seems very surprising that a man like Mordecai should be ignorant of this law of God, or that he should know it and join in the breach of it. Commentators are very willing to excuse him in this business. Mr. Scott[17]says, "It does not seem to have been left to the choice either of Mordecai or Esther;" and Dr. Gill[18]is willing to believe that the fair Jewess went by constraint. But, were this true, is it a justification of a breach of the Law of God? Why did Mordecai so uselessly hazard his own life and expose his whole nation to destruction by obstinately refusing to honor Haman, and yield so readily to this vile prostitution of Esther? If danger will warrant us to violate the Law of God, we will never want a pretext.

But there is no evidence that there was any reluctance in this business. There is no account of a search, nor of concealment on the part of Esther. So far from hiding Hadassah when the king's commandment was heard, it appears that Mordecai was uncommonly solicitous to promote her exaltation. Mr. Scott, indeed, attempts to plead his vindication in this, by alleging that, as he could not prevent her from becoming one of the concubines of Ahasuerus, he might thus endeavor to have her made queen. But even this reasoning is not good. Had she been violated by the despot, she would not be

justified in afterwards becoming his wife. Mordecai's zeal, then, to have her made queen, is, in every point of view, unjustifiable. It was contrary to the Law of God, yet it was in another point of view God's own appointment. Instead of eagerly seeking a union with the king, Hadassah should have chosen the scaffold in preference. Her crime was much heightened by submitting to become his concubine before she became his wife. How many chances were against her that she might never have been called a second time into his presence!

Mr. Scott alleges that "in her peculiar circumstances, the ritual law of not giving their daughters to those of another nation might not be thought obligatory." But can any circumstances justify the violation of a law of God? Very likely, indeed, Mordecai might have some way to excuse himself. The command, as contained in the Law of Moses, could not be unknown to him. But, like many good men now, he might have some way of excusing himself from obedience. But whatever this might be, he must have deceived himself. Neither times nor circumstances can relieve from the obligation of obeying God's Law. Could there be stronger circumstances to disannul the restriction as to marriage than those that existed in the return from the Babylonian captivity? Wives had been married, and therefore ruined if the marriage is broken; children are born of these marriages, and, if the marriage will not stand, they must not only be bastardized, but even deprived of a father's roof and education by him in the knowledge of the God of Israel. Yet all this was a matter of no consideration. Both wives and children must be disowned and driven away forever. Let us read the *Book of Ezra* and learn how sinful such marriages were accounted by all that feared God.

It is this wretched shift of times and circumstances that has subverted the whole order for Christ's house and changed every ordinance of His kingdom. The laws of the kingdom are read in the Book of God; but, by some peculiarity in their situation, good men plead their excuse from observance, or, by forced explanations, conform the canon[19]of Scripture to their own conduct. It requires but little ingenuity to devise a plausible pretext for not doing that to which we are averse, or for doing that we like.

Mordecai and Esther, then, were guilty in this affair. But this unaccountable ignorance of their duty prepared them to execute the part that God had allotted them in this wonderful display of His providence. Who can read this story without being convinced that this marriage was *God's* plan for delivering the Jews from the approaching danger? Can anything be clearer than that it was contrary to the Law of God? In some point of view, then, God *appoints* what the sin of man effects. He ordains actions that are entirely free, and in which men have all the guilt. This is as clear as the authority of Scripture can make it. Ask me to explain it, and I confess myself a child. I would as soon attempt to fathom space or calculate the moments of eternity. I believe it, I confess it before the world, I urge the reception of it on Christians—because God has testified it in His Word. Let God be true, and all men liars (Rom 3:4).

From this we see that the very ignorance of duty in the people of God may sometimes be providential and serve His purposes. I have no doubt that there are still in Babylon[20]many Mordecais and Esthers, whose ignorance in their unlawful situation is turned to the glory of God and the good of His people. But the good effected by them in such a situation *does not lessen their sin* in violating the Law of God. It is the hand of the Almighty that brings good out of evil, and makes the ignorance of His friends, as well as the wrath of His enemies, to praise Him. He will pardon them, but they will suffer loss, both in this world and in the next. Even in this world, the most gainful violation of God's Law is a loss to a Christian, and obedience, at the cost of the most expensive sacrifices, is a gain.

Outward prosperity

What says the Lord Jesus to this question?

"Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you,

There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mar 10:28-30).

The "hundredfold" in this life cannot be the things of this world, for then obedience would be merely mercenary speculation. God does not bribe us to do our duty. It appears to me that the "hundredfold" must be in the increase of light and enjoyment of God. The value of discovering God's mind in the Scriptures, and of beholding the glory of His character and ways, is incalculably great; and no one who has experienced it would exchange it for kingdoms. He is a blessed man who is the least in the kingdom of God; but that there are many Christians who would not exchange with their brethren of the lowest attainments their views of divine things, as they have been taught by the Word and Spirit of their God, for all the glory of this world. The man who knows most of God is the first man on earth.

There is no reason, then, to envy the condition of believers who, from ignorance, can enjoy lucrative situations, even if there were no future loss. The peace of God, which will always be enjoyed in proportion to knowledge and obedience, is beyond all the treasures of the world. This view of things is highly useful, for sometimes Christians may not only be tempted to envy the prosperity of the wicked, but even the condition of their brethren, whose ignorance allows them to possess more of the popularity, honors, and gains of the present world. Peter himself, when informed of the manner of his death, appears to have felt more from jealousy lest the beloved disciple might not be called to like suffering, than he did for the thing itself. "Lord," said he, "and what shall this man do?" It behooves us all to attend to the answer: "Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? *follow thou me*" (Joh 21:21-22).

There is an obvious advantage in knowing and doing the will of God. Paul says, "If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1Co 3:14-15). He who got the greater number of talents, and made the best use of them, was made ruler over the greater number of cities (Mat 25:14-30). And what talent can be compared with the knowledge of the will of God?

Some people are willing to believe that whatever is lost by obedience to the will of God, will in some way be made up to them, even in this world, though it is their duty to obey without this consideration. But this view is false, fanatical, and hurtful. Though in every situation we have a right to look to God, for this world as well as for the next, yet we know not to what sort of trials it may seem good to God to expose us. There is no safety in anything but in counting all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord, and to be ready for Him to suffer the loss of all things (Phi 3:8).

Pragmatism

Sometimes the servants of Christ excuse themselves from complete conformity to His institutions, and vindicate the observance of the commandments of men in the things of God, by alleging the field of usefulness that accommodation in these things lays open to them. If they can point to any good done by them, they suppose that it is God's approbation[21]of their situation. But in this they deceive themselves. Their conduct, as a transgression of the Law of God, remains sinful, though His sovereignty turns their disobedience to His glory and the good of His people. Obedience is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams (1Sa 15:22). It is a foul calumny[22]on God to suppose that it is necessary to disobey Him in order to do good. This takes it for granted that His laws defeat their own end. When, in the wisdom of God, He makes the ignorance of His people to serve His purpose, this no more excuses their ignorance and their conduct that results from it, than the good effects of the death of Christ will justify the crime of Judas Iscariot (Joh 13:27). God will, no doubt, forgive the ignorance of His people, but He will never hold it innocent. He will never approve it. Through the instrumentality of His people who

understand not the nature of His kingdom, God provides that multitudes hear the gospel, who are to those in a scriptural situation altogether inaccessible. Yet this does not warrant the situation.

Some of the people of God are in mystical Babylon, and, no doubt, will in some way serve God's purpose in that vile situation, yet the voice of God does not cease to sound in their ears, "Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev 18:4). A Christian who knows his duty would not break the least of the commandments of Jesus to enable him to turn the revenues of all the kings of the earth to the service of the cause of Christ. I might be asked, If all men should embrace my views of the nature of the Church of Christ and His ordinances, and act on them with rigor, what would be the consequence? Millions who now constantly hear the gospel would be entirely shut up from it, and the hundreds of thousands of pounds that are raised annually for the spreading of the gospel would fail. If none are to be embodied in the church except such as appear to be born again by the Spirit through the belief of the truth, how would the gospel be supported? How would it be spread over the World? And so asks the child, If the moon is not nailed to the sky, will it not fall? This is a prosperous fear. *Leave God's province to Himself; fill your own well.* Follow Jesus, though it should lead the whole world to be involved in darkness.

But there is no fear of such a result. Though God now makes use of the ignorance of His people to support and advance His cause; if they all knew their duty, He would give still more signal success. The silver and the gold are His. When it served Him, Jesus said to a rich man, "Zaccheus, come down; for today I must abide at thy house" (Luk 19:5). All the wealth of the world is at *His* absolute disposal, and the moment He needs it, He will call for it. Let not the servants of God do evil that good may come. Let them not disobey Him that they may put themselves in a condition to serve Him. I would not set at nought the least of Christ's little ones. I will acknowledge all who know Him, as far as I can know them, notwithstanding all the ignorance they may labor under. But I will not, out of complaisance, cease to declare what I learn from the Word of God; I cannot cease to call on Christians to follow Jesus. Their ignorance is *sin*. The good which they do through ignorance *is no justification* of it. Esther saved the Jews, but by being in a situation to do so, she *transgressed* the Law of her God.

Every step

The providence of God is seen in every step of the progress of Esther to her destined elevation. As in the case of Joseph when sold into Egypt, God provided friends for her in all who had the means of seeing her. He filled every heart with good-will towards her at first sight. The king's chamberlain was pleased with her from the first moment of her arrival, and accelerated her progress by every means in his power.

> *"So it came to pass, when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together unto Shushan the palace, to the custody of Hegai, that Esther was brought also unto the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. And the maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness of him; and he speedily gave her her things for purification, with such things as belonged to her, and seven maidens, which were meet to be given her, out of the king's house: and he preferred her and her maids unto the best place of the house of the women" (2:8-9).*

When her turn came to approach the king, "she required nothing but what Hegai the king's chamberlain, the keeper of the women, appointed. And Esther obtained favour in the sight of all them that looked upon her" (v. 15). Surpassing as her beauty was, this universal favour cannot be ascribed to it. In courts, envy and intrigue often prevail over every claim. Had not God disposed the hearts of those who beheld her, some far inferior beauty might have been the general favorite.

Notwithstanding her incomparable beauty, it was possible that the king's affections might have been anticipated by some of those who had previous access, or from caprice, or peculiarity of taste, he might have preferred another. But the providence of God had ordered this also, and no one pleased the king before the approach of the lovely Hadassah—and she obtained an instant preference.

"So Esther was taken unto king Ahasuerus into his house royal in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign. And 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 (2:16-17).

d. Mordecai's Elevation to Authority

The conspiracy of two of the king's chamberlains is another event in which we may see the hand of God for effecting the elevation of Mordecai, preserving him from the wrath of Haman, and investing him with authority for the defense of his people as well as the destruction of their enemies. A plot for the assassination of the sovereign is indeed no unprecedented thing in the courts of absolute monarchs. It is granted that the only impulse on the mind of the conspirators, exciting them to the murder of their master, was their resentment on account of whatever injury or provocation they had received. Their motives were not, in the remotest degree, to fulfill the counsel of God; nor are they sanctioned by Him. They are therefore themselves solely responsible for their wicked intentions. But that this conspiracy was ordered by God cannot surely be a matter of doubt with any who connect this fact with the others recorded in this history, and who believe the narrative to be the Word of God. It is here as evidently brought in to contribute towards the general issue as any incident in a drama. Take it away, and the whole chain is broken. Let us then admire the wonderful ways of Providence, in bringing about events through the freedom *and the sins* of human actions. Why did these officers receive provocation at this particular time? Why did they attend more to the gratification of their revenge than to their safety? Is a conspiracy to slay the sovereign the usual result of every great injury done by him to individuals? Why was not the conspiracy better conducted? Why was it made known and frustrated? Above all, why was Mordecai the man by whom it was discovered? Why was he the man to whom it was known? Take away this link of the chain, and all the other links are useless.

Whatever, then, was the means of bringing it to the knowledge of Mordecai, *it was God* that made it known to him, as much as if He had revealed it in a supernatural manner. Indeed, as Dr. Gill observes, "The latter Targum[23]says, it was showed unto him by the Holy Spirit"; for the wisdom of man cannot see how the providence of God can arrange human actions to fulfill His purpose without any miracle. How many chances were there, humanly speaking, that no conspiracy should have existed at this time, or that it should not have been found out; or, if discovered, that Mordecai should not have been the discoverer? Was not the event evidently intended to lay a foundation for the future safety, elevation, and power of Mordecai?

How encouraging is this doctrine! The Lord's people are frequently in danger. Their enemies lay snares for them that no human wisdom can enable them to escape. How consoling it is for them to reflect on this wonderful narrative! Here is a fact that ought to encourage them in their most trying difficulties. *The Lord laid a plan,* and prepared means for the deliverance of His people in the Persian empire, even *before* their enemies had prepared the plot for their destruction! When therefore we are encompassed on every side, let us look to the hand of the Lord to execute the plan that He may have prepared for our deliverance. When Hagar cried unto the Lord, He showed her a well (Gen 21:17-19), which is as wonderful in providence, if the fountain had been there from the creation, as if it had been opened by miracle.

2. Events Used to Bring the Jews to the Brink of Ruin

Having considered God's wise and gracious provision for the safety of His people during the approaching storm, we shall now attend to the events by which it was raised. We may discover the hand of God in this, no less than the former. The providence of God brings His people into danger, not because He is unable to ward off even the appearance of it, but that He may a) glorify Himself in their deliverance, and b) exercise their graces. Were they never in danger, they would be deprived of some of the greatest opportunities of praising the wisdom, kindness, and watchfulness of His providential care; His enemies would want[24]an occasion of manifesting[25]their enmity to them and Him; and their faith would be without its necessary trials. But though, in one point of view, God wills the persecution of His people, the *sin* of the persecutor *is all his own*. He is ignorant of God's purpose, and his enmity to them arises from his enmity to Him. Though he fulfills the appointment of God, yet he wickedly gratifies his own evil dispositions.

a. Haman's Promotion

It is a curious fact, but not a singular one, that *God raised up Hamanto bring His people into danger*, as well as Esther to deliver them. In this, as in other things, the divine wisdom is distinguished from the human in a striking manner. No man would nurture the wretch whom he should know to be the future enemy of himself and his offspring. But God exalted Haman in the court of the great king, above all the princes of the empire, for the very purpose of giving him an opportunity of manifesting his enmity against His people and of attempting the destruction of the whole nation. He puts His enemies in the most favorable situation to oppose Him, that He may show with what ease He can discomfit the utmost efforts of their malevolence. Nay, He makes the very wrath of man to praise Him, and the plans of His enemies to destroy His cause are made to effect its establishment.

The motives of Ahasuerus in the promotion of Haman were, no doubt, such as usually influence absolute sovereigns in conferring their favors and in choosing the objects of their particular bounty. In the caprice of affection, they set no bounds to their liberality, and the most unworthy men in the empire are often their favorites. It is not strange, then, that it should have been so on the present occasion. But the direction of Providence is clear even amidst apparent casualties. It was God Who raised Haman, as well as He had raised Pharaoh for a like occasion. The individual, the character, the crisis of his exaltation, the height of his elevation, are linked together by Providence for a good purpose. In such a light is this combination of circumstances exhibited in the inspired text. It is brought forward as one of the grand incidents that contribute their influence to bring about the result. "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him" (3:1). Why was Haman the favorite at this time? Why was he raised to such a pitch of glory?

b. Mordecai's Refusal to Honor Haman

The next event that presents itself to our consideration as contributing to bring the Jews into danger at

this time, is the refusal of Mordecai to honor Haman according to the king's commandment. Notwithstanding all that the commentators have said to justify Mordecai, I cannot but think that this part of his conduct arose from ignorance of his duty, and that he might lawfully have done the thing that he refused to do. Were it certain that Haman was an Amalekite, the fact would not vindicate a Jew in refusing him honor in the court of Persia. The command to extirpate[26]the Amalekites was given to Israel only as a nation, and when living in their own land.

> *"Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it" (Deu 25:19).*

What had Mordecai to do with this command in his present situation? But if Haman was really an Amalekite, and if this was the ground on which Mordecai refused to honor him, whether it was valid or invalid, the providence of God is visible in the matter. Why was the favorite an Amalekite? Why was one of that nation, at such a time, preferred to all the subjects of a hundred and twenty-seven provinces? On this supposition, had he been a Persian, Mordecai would have honored him without scruple, and so no storm would have risen against the Jews.

Civil honour

It is alleged in favor of Mordecai, that an idolatrous reverence might have been required. Dr. Gill makes wonderful[27]stretches to justify or excuse his conduct. As divine honors were given to the kings of Persia, he thinks that they might also have been exacted for their favorite; but of this he gives no proof. "It might be," will prove nothing; and nothing to justify such a supposition is in evidence from the passage. On the contrary, the thing that he is said to have refused is what he might lawfully have given. The king's command enjoined all his servants to "bow down and reverence Haman." What should prevent any man to comply with this injunction of supreme civil power? But Dr. Gill's ingenuity finds even in this an argument on his side. The fact that "*the king had so commanded concerning him*, shows," he thinks, "that it was more than civil honor and respect, for that in course would have been given him as the king's favorite." But this would not have been in all cases a matter of course, and that it was enjoined, there is the evidence of this record. The king requires nothing but *to bow and reverence*. Even had Haman pretended to be a god, of which there is not the slightest evidence, this would not excuse any one from bowing to him according to the king's commandment. Gaius[28]made himself a god, but should this have hindered his Christian subjects to bow down to him and reverence him? Even if there was a danger that it might be mistaken by some for religious worship, let the principle on which it is performed be declared, but let not what is lawfully due be withheld.

Dr. Gill argues that it must be more than civil respect that was required, because *that* the Jews did not refuse to give in the most humble and prostrate manner. This is just like saying that no Christian could refuse to uncover to the king, because Christians in general do this without scruple; yet William Penn would not uncover to King Charles. Besides, if Mordecai's conduct was influenced by a consideration of the nation of Haman, or anything in his individual character, this argument has no bearing. I cannot say why he refused: what I say is that he might have lawfully yielded all that was required.

That nothing more than civil honor was required for Haman by the king's command is clear from the ninth verse of the fifth chapter—"Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai." Here his offense was, that *he stood not up*, nor even *moved* himself to Haman. Can any sober mind interpret this of religious worship? Was there any idolatry in rising out of respect to the second man in the Persian empire? Whatever ceremonial might have been in approaching

great men in that country, on this occasion there is no ceremonial, for there was no approach. The great man is passing, and Mordecai will not stand up, nor even move to notice him. Dr. Gill himself admits that this was civil respect; but then, Mordecai, it seems, refuses even this, least it should be interpreted as religious worship. Was ever greater violence used in special pleading? So then not even the smallest respect ought to be given to heathen rulers who claim divine honors. But this, it seems, was only part of his reason. Mordecai was influenced, he says, partly by knowing that Haman had planned the destruction of the Jews. And would this justify him in refusing to obey the king's commandment? Another thing that weighed with Mordecai, he alleges, was that he confided in Esther's influence to save the Jews, and therefore treated Haman with marked contempt. But may rulers be disobeyed when this can be done with impunity?[29]Ought the man to be treated with contempt who is commanded by an absolute monarch to be honored above all his subjects? Is this the way in which Christians are to recommend the doctrine of Christ to the world?

But where is the necessity of arbitrarily supposing that this reverence must have had something idolatrous in it, when nothing but what is lawful is required in the words of the command? Was Mordecai so perfect in knowledge and infallible in conduct, that such a violent stretch must be made to justify him? It is argued by Mr. Scott that Mordecai was accepted of God in what he did, and therefore that his conduct must have been justifiable. But God's acknowledging him and interfering to deliver him, are *no* proof that *He approved* of this part of his conduct. If God would not deliver His people from the consequences of their ignorance, they would soon be destroyed. Is there any passage in this history that, either by implication or expressly, commends Mordecai for not bowing to Haman? I admit that his motives may have been good. If he intended to honour God, his motives would be approved, though his conduct might be the effect of ignorance. We see from Romans 14 that God accepts His people even in their ignorance, when they are influenced by a regard to His authority. But this does not change error into truth, nor sin into duty. I think it is manifest that Mordecai acted on principle, for even when he saw the frightful consequences of his conduct, he persisted in it with the utmost steadiness. The text also seems to insinuate that he considered his being a Jew as a reason for refusing honour to Haman. But whether this had an eye to the nation or character of Haman, or in what way he supposed his being a Jew could justify his conduct, is not said and cannot be known.

It has also been very properly replied that the homage required does not seem to differ from that paid to Joseph by his brethren and by the Egyptians, or from those forms of civil reverence that the greatest saints, of whom the Old Testament gives account, observed without scruple before their superiors. Ezra and Nehemiah, and even Mordecai himself, must have rendered the same homage to the king of Persia. It is answered that in these cases, with respect to the Persian monarch, the forms of approach may have been dispensed with, in the approach of the Jews. But this is gratuitous[30]and exceedingly unlikely. It is not in evidence and cannot be accepted as truth. But what will utterly destroy this forced supposition is that Esther, in her first approach to the king, must have complied with the ceremonial, and she could not have been excused by her nation, for it was not known that she was a Jewess. And in all this she followed the counsel of Mordecai. What is still more, even after the nation of Esther was known, she not only did without scruple what Mordecai refused to Haman, but she prostrated herself before the king: "And Esther spake yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and besought him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews" (8:3). Here she submits to the humblest prostrations to the king. Mordecai refuses to stand up, or even to move, in honour of Haman; Esther prostrates herself at the feet of Ahasuerus. It is utterly vain by special pleading to hope to save Mordecai in this matter.

Sufficiency of Scripture

This point is of no great importance in itself, but the forced interpretations and violent suppositions that are used in order to justify Mordecai, is a specimen, in the disciples of Christ themselves, of the effects of human wisdom to conform the Word of God to itself, *instead of implicitly bowing to its dictates*. Had the learned and good men who have recourse to this criticism, in order to justify a man of God, met with such an instance of outraging the inspired text in the writings of the opposers of the doctrines of grace, they would have justly exclaimed with wonder, indignation, and horror. But they can consecrate the same licentious[31]principle to make the text speak agreeably to their own wisdom. I have often observed that, in vindicating their own errors, the disciples of Christ avail themselves of the most licentious of the principles of criticism, which are the usual recourse of the wildest heretics. On the contrary, the man of God ought to accustom himself in all things to conform himself to the Word of God, to make his own wisdom bow to the Scriptures, and to *receive implicitly whatsoever they teach*.

Here then, we see that even the ignorance of God's people is employed to fulfill His purposes. Mordecai's ignorance was *sinful;* but had he been better instructed in his duty, he could not have been employed on this occasion. Many a piece of service God has, in every age, allotted to some of His people for which they are fitted by their ignorance. That He should bestow gifts on His people to enable them to fill the station allotted to them, is not a matter of surprise to any—but that the very ignorance of His people should fit them for certain situations for which He has designed them, could hardly be anticipated.

Submission to authority

From this fact we may also perceive that our ignorance of duty may frequently bring danger and persecution upon ourselves and the whole body of Christians with which we are connected. Haman's resolution to destroy the whole Jewish nation was occasioned by Mordecai's refusal to honour him. It is true, indeed, commentators are willing to believe that Haman's including the whole Jewish nation with Mordecai was influenced by the conviction that they were all of the same sentiment on this subject. This, however, is not only not in evidence, but it is directly contrary to the reason assigned by the Holy Spirit in the narrative.

> *"And when Haman saw that Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence, then was Haman full of wrath. And he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone; for they had showed him the people of Mordecai: wherefore Haman sought to destroy all the Jews that were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even the people of Mordecai" (3:5-6).*

Mordecai is then fully chargeable with all the natural effects of his ignorance, even though a merciful Providence prevented the execution of threatened vengeance. When an ill-informed Christian manifests a refractory,[32]unsubmitting spirit towards his superiors, it brings odium[33]and persecution on all connected with him. That God should give the government of the world to His enemies, and demand submission to the wicked, is not what the wisdom of this world could expect. If Christians will listen to the counsel of their own hearts, rather than to the dictates of the divine Word, they will think it very unreasonable that the children of the great King, the heirs of God, should tamely yield to the evil men in power, and honour their persecutors. But such is the law of *that* kingdom which is not of *this* world. That spirit that refuses honour to worthless men in power is not the spirit of the gospel. That proud and insolent piety that refuses the customary tokens of respect even to majesty was not practised by the patriarchs nor was it inculcated by the Apostles. If it finds shelter in the conduct of Mordecai, it ought to be known that it is sanctioned only by Mordecai's sin.

c. Esther's Concealment of Her Nationality

The next providential circumstance we shall review is Esther's concealing of her kindred. Had it been

know to Haman that Esther was a Jewess and the near kinswoman of Mordecai, he certainly would not have attempted any violent measures against either Mordecai or the Jews. Notwithstanding his mortification on account of the insult, he would have found it prudent to smother his resentment, or to gratify it in a more indirect way. He could not have expected to prevail as long as Esther retained any share of the affections of the king. Mordecai's intention in enjoining Esther to conceal her descent was, no doubt, lest her being a captive Jewess might prevent her advancement to the situation of queen. The odium of her religion, as well as the captivity of her nation, would appear to him to stand in the way of her elevation. God's intention by that concealment was to preclude a circumstance that would have prevented the danger of His people. He designed to bring them to the very brink of ruin, that He might manifest His power in their deliverance. It was ignorance and carnal policy in Mordecai; yet, in another view, it was ordained by God for a wise purpose.

Worldly wisdom

From this we may see that worldly policy in religion naturally leads to disappointment and trouble. When by their wisdom Christians seek preferment, or endeavour to escape the cross, *by concealing any part of the truth*, they are generally preparing a scourge for their own back. Esther, by the advice of Mordecai, concealed her religion for the purpose of obtaining a situation that would enable her to protect the cause and people of God; but by that concealment the ruin of her whole nation would have been effected, had not a merciful God interposed to ward off the intended blow. Every means contrary to the Word of God promises affliction to the people of God. Believers who conceal the truth to obtain any worldly advantage may congratulate their policy when they succeed; but let them look about, for danger and sorrow are pursuing them. They have made a pit in which they will sink if a merciful God prevent not the natural tendency of their conduct.

From the bold and independent spirit of Mordecai, we may reasonably infer that his desire of the advancement of his kinswoman was more influenced by zeal for the good of his nation than by any views of private advancement. The advantage of her exaltation to the cause of the captive Jews would blind him to his sin. How often do Christians, reasoning on the same principle, overlook the Laws of God! Jesus Christ, by His Apostles, separated His disciples from the world for observance of the ordinances of His kingdom; but human wisdom has violated this order, and sought protection and power to the cause of God through a "*marriage*" *with the world*. In the writings of the Apostles, we everywhere meet with the distinction between Christ's people—who are called "Christians," "believers," "saints"—and the rest of mankind, who are called "the world," those who are without, etc. But by the marriage of Esther with Ahasuerus, there is now no "world"—there are none without, for every man in Christendom either belongs to what is called the church, or may belong to it if he chooses.

That this "marriage" has produced some good effects, I am not the person to deny: it may often have been a shield to the people of God. But with all the advantages that it has ever had, the bans are forbidden, for the marriage is contrary to the Word of God. None ought to have a place in the church of Christ but such as appear to be His disciples. When the Lord shall stand upon the wall that was made by a plumb-line, with a plumb-line in His hand, the high places of Israel shall be desolate and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste: "The greatest possible good to the cause of God cannot justify the smallest deviation from His commands. Let the ark of God itself fall, rather than attempt to uphold it with a human hand" (see Amo 7:7).

God's mercy

Let us adore the mercy of our God, Who steps forward in the time of our danger to rescue us from the consequences of our own policy. He might justly have given up Mordecai and Esther to reap the reward of their sin. But as their conduct was the effect of ignorance, He saves them from ruin and promotes them to honour. Their devotedness to the cause of God is unquestionable. He forgets not the glory of His own name, and though His people are ignorant and sinful, He looks to the perfection of the righteousness of their Substitute, His own dearly beloved Son.

d. The King's Commandment

Not only was the great elevation of Haman providential, the commandment of the king for all to reverence him in a marked manner was also directed by the divine counsel. The favour of the king would indeed naturally have procured respect for the object of it; but the royal command made the neglect a breach of the laws of the king and exposed it to the notice of the other servants, who made it known to Haman. "Why transgresseth thou the king's commandment?" (3:3) is a question which shows that the offence was considered not a breach of courtesy merely, but the violation of the royal authority. Without this commandment, Mordecai might have escaped. That Haman was immediately informed of the people to whom Mordecai belonged was also providential, for he had not previously known this. Had not this been discovered, the body of the Jewish nation would have escaped the dangers to which Mordecai was exposed. But a wise Providence took care that this fact should not lie hid, that His name might be glorified in the salvation of His people and in the destruction of their enemies. Why was Esther's descent unknown, though she was advanced to the consort of majesty, while Mordecai's was notified as soon as his offense? Yet the other servants themselves had not previously known this. It was on this very occasion that he himself discovered his kindred: "For he had told them that he was a Jew" (3:4). Here we see that, as the caution of Mordecai in advising Esther to conceal her nation was the means of bringing it into the utmost danger of total extinction, his voluntary discovery of his descent was now to have the same effect. The utmost exertions of human wisdom may often be employed to bring about what they are intended to prevent.

But what above all calls for our wonder is that a monarch, who ought to consider himself the father of all his people, shall, for no purpose but the gratification of a wicked favourite, give up a whole nation to perdition. If no sentiments of duty or of pity had any weight with him, why did not his interest as a sovereign forbid his compliance with the cruel request? Yet, in defiance of every principle of humanity, justice and policy—without even the pretense of any misconduct—he gave the lives of the whole Jewish nation, "both young and old, little children and women," a present to his unprincipled favourite (3:13). The unsubstantial reasons alleged are not weighed, but received implicitly, without examination. After all, there is nothing in the history to show that Ahasuerus was a cruel or tyrannical man. His conduct in this instance is an easy, unsuspecting compliance in a matter that required the utmost deliberation and caution.

Obedience and separation

Let us attend a moment to the argument employed by the crafty favourite to overreach his master and destroy the people of God.

> *"And Haman said unto king Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of thy kingdom; and their laws are diverse from all people; neither keep they the king's laws: therefore it is not for the king's profit to suffer them. If it please the king, let it be written that they may be destroyed: and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver to the hands of those that have the charge of the business, to bring it into the king's treasuries" (3:8-9).*

What was the head and the front of the offence of this people? Their laws were different from those of all other nations. They would not observe the religious institutions that were ordained by man. The civil law of the countries of their captivity it was their duty to obey. Their God commanded them to "Seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it" (Jer 29:7). But to neglect the ordinances of their God, or to observe the religious rites appointed by man, they had no license. Why were the Jews to be blamed for the singularity of their institutions, for their scrupulous separation from other nations, and for their firmness in refusing compliance with the rites of all other religions? If their laws were singular, were they not the laws of God? Why do kings and rulers pretend to interfere between God and His people? Why do wretched mortals assume an authority to set aside what God enjoins? Let Christians in every country render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, but to God the things that are God's (Mar 12:17). If rulers must usurp the throne of God, let them attempt to alter the rising of the sun, or regulate the changes of the moon, but let them not dare to meddle with the laws of the kingdom of Christ.

The allegations of Haman against the Jews are still substantially the ground of accusation against those who fully follow the churches planted by the Apostles, and refuse compliance with all the institutions of man in the things of God. They are held up as a singular kind of people, who, by the peculiarity of their religious observances and their uncompliant spirit with respect to every deviation from the ordinances of God, manifest disaffection to the government of the country. In their religious observances, they are accused as being "diverse from all people" (3:8). Fear of this accusation, more, perhaps, than any other cause, keeps the people of God from discovering the ordinances of Christ, and induces them to accommodate, as far as possible, to some of the great sects in the countries where they live. Israel grew weary of the government of God and desired a king, that they might be like other nations. How long will the children of God neglect the laws of His kingdom! When will they return to the order and ordinances of His house!

How grateful ought Christians to be who live in a land of liberty! What a blessing it is to have the exercise of their religion secured to them by the laws of the state! If any of them are so ill-informed as not to be impressed with the value of this privilege, let them think of the Jews in the time of Esther—let them think of the state of Christians in this country in ages past, and in some other countries at the present moment. What a wretched thing it is to live in a country whose rulers assume the authority of God and dictate in the things of religion! What a revolting idea to live in a country where an incensed favorite may receive a present of the lives of a whole nation! How degraded is the state of man in a country where an insolent courtier offers the sovereign a price for the lives of a whole people!

Yet the Christian has nothing to fear in any country. If he is called to suffer, it will be for God's glory and his own unspeakable advantage. If God has no purpose to serve by the sufferings of His people, He can, even under the most despotic governments, procure them rest. Jesus rules in the midst of His enemies, and is Master of the resolves of despots. He restrains their wrath, or makes it praise Him. If He chooses, He can give His people power even with the most capricious tyrants. They are as safe in the provinces of the empire of Ahasuerus, as in the dominions of Great Britain. The history of the *Book of Esther* demonstrates that *there is no danger from which the Lord cannot rescue His people,* even through the medium of the ordinary course of events. Without a single miracle, He brings them from the very brink of ruin, and precipitates their enemies into the abyss. We see them, as a nation, formerly given over to destruction by an irrevocable decree; yet they escape without the suffering of an individual.

Necessity of God's protection

> *"And the king took his ring from his hand, and gave it unto Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. And the king said unto Haman, The silver is given to thee, the people also, to do with them as it seemeth good to thee" (3:10-11).*

Even the power of the king himself could not revoke the grant. Letters were sent to all the provinces of the empire, to secure the entire extirpation of the hated race. The enmity of the nations to the Jews is simulated by their avarice. They are permitted "to take the spoil of them for a prey." Can human wisdom descry any possible means of escape for the captives of Israel in the midst of their enemies? Yet God is their Deliverer!

Haman now thought his victory secure. The royal decree is obtained, and messengers are sent out with it to all the king's lieutenants in the provinces, in the languages of all the nations subject to Persia. "And the king and Haman sat down to drink, but the city Shushan was perplexed" (3:15). Little did that unthinking monarch reflect on the misery to which his rash indulgence of a favorite had consigned so many of his innocent subjects. Could absolute monarchs get a view of the mischief caused by the oppression of their wicked favorites, they would often shrink from it with horror. Many a bloody decree originates, not so much in the cruelty of their nature, as in the seducing flatteries of their courtiers. They watch the pliant hour, and in the moment of good-humor they obtain the fatal grant. From that moment they keep the matter at a distance from his ear, and divert his attention by the gratifications of intemperance and debauchery. How insensible is the mind of men in certain situations! "There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart, it does not feel for man." Despots and their sycophants sit down to their drunken banquets, after giving decrees that involve whole nations in misery!

As God can protect His people under the greatest despotism, so the utmost civil liberty is no safety to them without the immediate protection of His almighty arm. I fear that Christians at present in this country have too great a confidence in political institutions, and in the enlightened views of the public on the rights of conscience. We hear more boasting of the march of mind than of the government of God. It is thought impossible, into whatever hands power may fall, that rulers in this country should ever attempt to effect uniformity in religion, or apply force in the affairs of religion. Such an opinion is as unfounded in the philosophy of human nature as it is destitute of the authority of history and of the Word of God. There are not wanting some symptoms of the rise of Haman, and if he does not at length obtain a present of the lives of his enemies, it will be owing, not to the light of our politicians, but to the overruling providence of God in opposition to that light. At all events, let Christians confide in the power and watchfulness of their God, not in the schemes of fanatical politicians. Even at the present moment, I am confident that there are many places in the British empire where there is not entire liberty of conscience. There may be the liberty of the statute book when there is danger from the mob. But where there is not perfect safety for the Christian in exercising, publishing, and spreading his religion, there is not practical liberty of conscience. To have liberty of conscience, we must not only be freed from all force constraining us to profess a religion that we do not assume, we must also be safe in the most active and public efforts to spread our own.

3. Events Used for the Deliverance of God's People

Let us now attend to the providence of God effecting the deliverance of His people from this awful danger, and precipitating their enemies into the pit that they had prepared for others.

a. Haman's Lots

The disposal of the lots cast before Haman, to ascertain the most lucky day for striking the intended blow, attracts our attention as the first providential circumstance for the salvation of the Jews. Even before Haman had obtained the royal consent for destroying them, he had used divination to discover the most fortunate time for executing his purpose.

Shall the oracle of Satan be compelled to speak for God? Shall the god of this world lose all his sagacity[34]when he comes to fix the destruction of the people of the Lord? Why did he choose the last month in the whole year, when the execution of his plan would have been promoted by immediate dispatch? "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD" (Pro 16:33). He works His own will by the counsels of demons, as well as through the agency of the angels of His presence.

> *"In the first month, that is, the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of king Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, to the twelfth month, that is, the month Adar" (3:7).*

From the directing of this oracle, the day of execution was fixed on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, that is, more than eleven months after the decree. Whether the laws of nature, or the agency of infernal spirits guided this answer, it was evidently *ordained by God* for the salvation of His people. Had the day of execution been immediate, there was nothing to prevent Haman's wicked purpose from taking effect. But his very superstition is made to cooperate in God's plan for the preservation of Israel. When the devil himself is consulted, he gives the most foolish advice to his friends when God has any purpose to fulfill by it. He that was a murderer of the saints from the beginning is here made an instrument to effect their preservation.

Demonism

We have here a key to the providence of God with respect to the heathen oracles. Though they uttered the responses of demons, they were made the means of fulfilling the purposes of God. Satan by them rules the world, but God in them overruled Satan himself. While the devil was the god of this world, and held men captive at his pleasure, Jehovah ruled the earth as absolutely as He did the angels of heaven. While men in general were serving the prince of darkness, the Lord effected His own sovereign purposes through their agency. Human wisdom may exclaim, How is this? Let it fathom the depths of the divine wisdom before it repeats the question. If God is God, the rebellion of devils and of man *must* be in some way for His glory.

By a like expedient, Jehovah provided that Jonah should be cast into the sea (Jon 1:15). He raised a tremendous storm against the ship in which the refractory prophet was sailing. But what providence is in a storm? The philosopher sees in this nothing but what he calls nature and the laws of nature. "But *the*

LORD sent out a great wind into the sea" (Jon 1:4). Although storms, earthquakes, pestilence, thunder, war, and famine may all be brought about by natural causes, they are all the work of the Almighty. [35]But when the storm is raised, how is it to manifest Jonah? It is through the impression of the heathen mariners that it was sent as a judgment. Why were they struck with this impression now? Did they look on all storms in this light? or did they judge from the peculiarly tremendous nature of this tempest? In whatever manner the impression came, it was to fulfill the purpose of God. But even with this impression, how is the guilty person to be detected? How are these heathen to find out the will of the God of Israel? It is through the means of their own superstition. It is by casting lots; and though God *always* disposes the lot, there is no reason to believe that He will always in this way manifest a guilty person. Were this the case, rulers would have no difficulty in detecting guilt and discriminating between the guilty and the innocent. But the heathen mariners acted on their own superstitious opinion, which was nothing better than the origin of dueling; and in this instance God spake through their oracle: "So they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonah" (Jon 1:17).

God overrules

Here, then, we see the way of Providence. The Ruler of the world effects His purposes by every agent, and makes use of the opinions and motives of the resolutions and actions of all men. Nay, He overrules their very crimes to fulfill His plans. In these sentiments of the heathen mariners, however erroneous they are in some respects, yet it is pleasing to see the strong conviction of an overruling Providence. This is strikingly obvious, both in their opinion of the cause of the storm and in their expedient of the lots. As Aelian[36]has observed,

> *"Atheism is the refinement of speculation, and not the dictate of human nature. No one of the barbarians ever fell into atheism, or started a doubt as to the existence of the gods. They have no such discussion as, Are there gods? and if there are gods, do they take care of us? Neither Indian, nor Celt, nor Egyptian, ever conceived such a notion as Epicurus and the atheistic Grecian sages."*

Now, this observation of the heathen historian is of great importance. In whatever way the impression has been received, it is general that divine Providence rules in all the affairs of man. This view of nature is only stifled by some of the greatest fools in human shape, who style themselves philosophers.

b. Haman's Delay

But let us return to the history of Mordecai. How wonderful is the providence of God in restraining Haman from taking immediate vengeance on receiving a fresh insult, as he returned in triumph from Esther's banquet!

> *"Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. Nevertheless Haman refrained himself !" (5:9-10).*

There is something more wonderful in this than even in a miracle. In my view, Almighty power would not have been so illustriously displayed, had God interfered to save Mordecai by causing the earth to open and swallow his adversary, as by ruling his impetuous passions without interfering with the freedom of his determinations. Haman has a royal irrevocable decree for the destruction of the whole Jewish nation; he is elated beyond measure by being the only person invited to the queen's banquet with the king; he is again insulted by the man whom he so much abhorred; his mind is full of wrath—yet he refrains from immediate violence! Where did he learn his self-command? Look at the mouths of the hungry lions with Daniel before them; look again at the enraged Haman, and Mordecai untouched in his presence. God, Who stopped the mouths of the lions, and preserved His children in the furnace, manifested here a more wonderful power in directing the free will of a bloody persecutor, armed with the

authority of the Persian empire. It was Haman's own action—"he restrained himself "—yet it was the working of the providence of God. Not so wonderful would it be to see a ship standing motionless in the midst of the tumult of the waves, or the raging billows rolling to the shore without touching the rocks, as to see Haman "restraining himself " on *this* occasion. Let the children of God read, believe, and rejoice. When their enemies are maddened with rage, their God can make them restrain themselves, even without changing their heart. By His inscrutable providence they willingly resolve to refrain from injury, or to delay vengeance, even while they feel no pity.

c. Esther's Approach

We may recognize the hand of Providence in overcoming the fears of Esther when solicited to approach the king in behalf of the Jews. By going uncalled into the inner court, she would subject herself to death by law. Judging from the manners of our own country, we may think that her risk was small. But in estimating her danger, we ought to take into account the caprice of despots in countries where polygamy prevails. In a moment they devote to destruction the object on which they doated the moment before. Besides, Esther had reason to apprehend an alienation of affection, or at least a coldness, as she had not been called into his presence for thirty days previously. Here, indeed, is another providential circumstance that ought to excite our wonder. Whatever was the reason why the king had so long neglected her, the thing was undoubtedly a part of the divine plan, that Esther's danger might be increased, her faith put to the severer trial, and His own power more fully manifested in obtaining for her a gracious reception.

Obstacles

Let the children of God look at this and take a lesson. When He calls them to arduous duties, instead of smoothing the way and removing the appearance of difficulty or danger, He often, by His providence, throws obstacles in their way. A wife, in following Christ, instead of delighting her husband, may give him the greatest offence. Children may make their very parents their enemies by their obedience to their heavenly Father. Instead of inducing His disciples to discover His laws and ordinances by the prospects of greater acceptance with the world, He promises them nothing but ridicule and hatred. Instead of flattering every instance of obedience with additional honours and rewards from men, the discovery of the laws and institutions of Christ's kingdom may be followed by the loss of all things. God will not bribe His people to serve Him. He will not secure their allegiance by hiding them from danger. They must give their life, if He calls for it, or give up the hope of the heavenly inheritance. They must count the cost and be willing to incur it; they must take up the cross and follow Him (Luk 14:26-33). They are not to fear him who has power to kill the body, but rather Him Who can punish both soul and body in hell forever (Mat 10:28). *Christ must be obeyed in the prospect of every danger*. He that loves his life shall lose life eternal (Joh 12:25). Yet, in general, it may be observed that, when Christians are made willing to face every danger for Christ's sake, the greatest real dangers that they may have dreaded are turned away from them. When God has tried them sufficiently, *He removes the trial* (Jam 1:2-4). Esther's apparent danger was heightened by her long neglect. Yet, after all, her God procured her acceptance with the king.

An extreme trial

It is absurd in any at this time to underrate the trial of Esther. She must herself, doubtless, have been a

better judge of the extent of her danger than we can now possibly be; and she estimated it so highly that at first she altogether refused to comply with the request—even of Mordecai, to whom she had in all other things paid the deference due to a father.

> *"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 of his 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" (4:11).*

Her life, then, was actually forfeited by the act; and to spare her was the pardon of a criminal condemned to die. Besides, she must, in this approach to the king, appear in a new character, as a captive, as a Jewess, as one of these already given up to death in the grant to Haman. In such circumstances she might well be apprehensive that by her death he might make way for a successor. What trust is to be put in the affections of a capricious despot? What confidence is to be placed in the unfeeling man who could give up the beautiful Vashti? Might not some reasons of state operate to the destruction of Esther?

Her apprehensions of the magnitude of her danger was evident in the preparations with which she thought it necessary to approach him. All the Jews in Shushan fasted three days, night and day, before she ventured on the dangerous service. It is also evident in the words in which she expressed her determination, that having counted the cost, she was prepared to give her life as a sacrifice for her friends: "If I perish, I perish" (4:16). She consented not to undertake this mission till she overcame the fear of death.

What a blessing is marriage according to the institution of God! Was she truly a wife who could not trust her life with her husband? Better to be the wife of a Christian peasant, than the queen of a Persian despot! In the midst of all her regal honours, what happiness could Esther enjoy in her situation? Yet with what preposterous artifice[37]did she and her guardian court the dangerous height! The prospect of wretchedness will not deter the fallen human mind from seeking the glories of this world, even at the expense of the soul. Man is a strange compound of meanness and of pride.

d. Mordecai's Arguments

Let us glance at the arguments by which Mordecai prevailed on the queen to undertake to intercede for the Jews. They are such as were calculated to produce the desired effect, and were, no doubt, suggested by a gracious Providence. The faith manifested by Mordecai in the divine protection approaches to that of Abraham himself. If, then, faith is the gift of God, there is no doubt that Providence directed the resolution of Esther.

> *"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?" (4:13-14).*

Notwithstanding the greatness of the danger, Mordecai appears confident that his God would raise up deliverance from some quarter. He rightly interprets the intention of Providence in raising her to royalty for this very occasion. Here we have a beautiful example of the view of Providence entertained at that time by the people of God. Mordecai knew well the events that led to the exaltation of Esther. He knew that she was raised in the ordinary course of human affairs. He knew that her exaltation was owing to the divorce of Vashti, and to her own surpassing beauty. An atheist would have no difficulty in accounting for it. Yet Mordecai believed also that *God* raised her, and justly concluded from the present danger that His purpose in raising her was for the very purpose of interceding for the Jews. At all events, he concluded that, as she had it in her power to make an effort for their preservation with probable hopes of success, should she refuse to make trial of her influence, she might expect that God would signally punish her, and save His people in some other way.

Sacrificial service

Let all Christians learn from this not to be backward in using their influence to protect the people of God and serve the interests of His kingdom. If they hide their face, God will provide other instruments, and they shall not be without chastisement. If from apprehensions of danger they decline any service that the providence of God lays before them, the very thing that is dreaded may come upon them, and others may be honoured to do the work in safety. God said to Jeremiah,

> *"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the LORD, to deliver thee" (Jer 1:17-19).*

By the gospel the elect of God are to be saved from a greater destruction than that which threatened the Jews in the time of Esther. The gospel is to be spread over the world by the means of the disciples of Christ. Let them therefore brave danger, shame, and loss in publishing the glad tidings of salvation. Why have eighteen centuries passed since the giving of the command to preach the gospel to all nations, while many have not yet heard of the name of Jesus? The Lord's time indeed may not be come, but this does not excuse the indolence of His servants. The commandment is come; that is the only thing with which we are concerned. The Lord will, no doubt, raise up instruments to effect His purpose in the proper time, but this will not make up the loss or excuse the neglect of His slumbering servants.

By the institutions of Christ, His children are to be nourished and advanced in the knowledge of Him. But the nature of *His* kingdom is yet little understood; and every one of His ordinances, having been changed in Babylon, still remain incrusted with superstition and human inventions. The children of God, then, are deprived of much of that wholesome nourishment which the pure ordinances of God are calculated to yield. Let allegiance to Jesus and the love of His people influence His disciples who know His will, to zeal in making it known to others. Let no mistaken complaisance, with respect to the corruptions of divine institutions, prevent them from denouncing everything contrary to the Word of God. Let not the emolument[38]of office, the reproach of the world, or deference to the prejudice of God's people, induce them to practice what is not taught in Scripture, or to decline adopting everything enjoined by the authority of Christ. Has He not Himself said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? Ye are my disciples if ye do whatsoever I command you" (Joh 15:14).

Let not Christians who know the law and ordinances of Jesus fear to exert themselves in their defense. The corruptions of the ordinances of Christ are sanctioned by so many prejudices, and strengthened by so many interests, that Christians in general are irritated when they are called to inquire. The wise virgins have laid themselves down to slumber, and they are peevish with those who attempt to awake them (Mat 25:1-13). If they do arise for a moment, it is usually to plead for a little more sleep, and to remonstrate[39]against the violence and cruelty of the untimely intruders.

Dead to censure

He who will revive all the ordinances of Christ, and denounce everything human in religion, must be prepared for a kind of martyrdom even from Christians. This is much more painful than the enmity of the world, but even this he is not to fear. If believers, from the apprehension of becoming unpopular even with the churches of Christ, hide their knowledge, or decline to employ their talents according to their opportunities, let them learn from the lesson of Mordecai to Esther, that God can do *His* work without them; and that in some way they may expect the divine displeasure. There cannot be a doubt that a

Christian consults his good, upon the whole, by boldly and unreservedly doing the will of God. The more he shows himself dead to censure and to praise, the more he disregards gain and loss when they stand in the way of duty—then the more he will have reason to rejoice in the end. Let his ambitions always be fired with the hope of ruling over ten cities. Esther, to save the people of God, flung herself at the feet of the despot at the hazard of her life; but, instead of being put to death, Esther met with a most gracious reception. A day will come at last, when obedience to the most disagreeable of Christ's commandments will appear great gain.

Wholesome admonition

We may also perceive here the good effect of wholesome admonition on a stumbling servant of God. The fear of man had prevailed over the love of her brethren in the mind of Esther, but faithful admonition kept her from falling. How forcible are right words! From the suggestion of Mordecai, it appears that though the royal decree consigned the whole Jewish race to death, yet that she counted on safety in the palace as the wife of the king. But Mordecai undeceives her on this, and took away her flattering hopes. By declining to do duty, she put herself from under the divine protection, and engaged the displeasure of Providence to seek her out for destruction. Notwithstanding all her confidence in her situation, he denounces death to her and her father's house if she declined the dangerous service. It is always under some false confidence that the children of God decline to obey Him. To expose them is, by the divine blessing, the means of recovering the stumbling individual. Let not the servants of Jesus perceive one another going astray, or halting on the Christian race, without endeavoring to recover them.

By the words of Mordecai, through the divine blessing, Esther was brought back from a state of abject timidity to the confidence and boldness of a martyr. "If I perish, I perish!" Such ought to be the resolution of all God's servants. They should count the cost, and be willing to part with property, fame, popularity, friends, relatives, life, for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Christ said,

> *"If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luk 14:26-27).*

An Apostle says, "As Christ laid down his life for us, we ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1Jo 3:16).

An incidental remark or an allusive application of the words in which Esther expressed her devotedness, may not be useless. People in a certain state of mind are represented as saying, "If I perish, I will perish at the feet of Jesus!" Surely there can be no similarity between the situation of a person approaching a despot, contrary to law, at the hazard of life, and that of one approaching the merciful Redeemer, by the command of God, with the assurance of pardon. There is no possibility of perishing at the feet of Jesus. Men perish through unbelief, and in refusing to come to Him: "And *ye will not* come to me, that ye might have life" (Joh 5:40). Whosoever comes to Jesus shall not be cast out.

Use of means

From the conduct of Mordecai on this occasion, we may see that confidence in God *does not preclude the use of means*. Mordecai had immediate recourse to the influence of Esther; though, it is evident, he ultimately relied on the power and providence of God. It is obvious from his observations that he expected preservation from God through the use of means, even had Esther declined the intercession. "If thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place" (4:14). Let us learn from this, that as God has promised to protect us and provide for us, it is *through the means of His appointment*—vigilance, prudence, and industry—that we

are to look for these blessings.

e. Esther's Reception

We shall now view the providence of God in the reception of Esther. Life and death are on the countenance of the despot, and according to the will of God he frowns or smiles. Had God designed her death, she would have found the king in another temper. But is not the king's heart in the hand of the Lord? Does He not turn it as He pleases (Pro 21:1)? Esther is received most graciously, and accosted in the most affectionate manner. The coldness that had overlooked her for thirty days gives place to the utmost warmth of affection, and, instead of the denunciation of death that she at first feared, she now hears the expressions of the most extravagant bounty.

> *"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 favour in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden scepter that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the scepter. 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" (5:1-3).*

Confidence in God's favour

This favour was the spontaneous affection of the king's own heart; but in another point of view, it was God Who gave her that favour. Who is so blind as not to see the hand of God in this? Who is so stupid as not to ascribe the glory to the Almighty in this matter? Who does not here recognize Joseph's God? "But the LORD was with Joseph, and showed him mercy, *and gave him favour* in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Gen 39:21). Who does not see the Lord that always interfered for Israel, and will always interfere for the deliverance of the true Israel of God? Who gave favour to the Israelites in the sight of the Egyptians on their leaving of Egypt? "And I will give this people favour," says God, "in the sight of the Egyptians: and it shall come to pass, that, when ye go, ye shall not go empty" (Exo 3:21).

Christian, see here the security of God's people in doing duty; see the encouragement to confidence in His protection. From this learn the importance of humbling thyself before thy God in the hour of trial. See the duty of fasting and prayer in the time of trouble and danger; see the resource of God's people in the time of their calamity. If we need the protection of men, let us first ask it from God. If we prevail with Him, the power of the most mighty and of the most wicked must minister to our relief. Esther and her friends first cried unto the Lord and humbled themselves before Him, and then she went to the king.

> *"Then Esther bade them return Mordecai this answer, Go, gather together all the Jews that are present 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" (4:15-16).*

How often do Christians look first to the means of deliverance! How often do they try every resource before they go to God with a simple and confident reliance on Him! How is their unbelief rebuked here! What encouragement does this hold out to confidence in God in the utmost danger! Only let us believe, and all things are possible.

f. Esther's Delay

Esther's delay in preferring her request is another providential circumstance. It is strange that she did not hastily take advantage of the good-humor of the monarch, before she gave him time for reflecting and bad counsel. She might not find him again so complaisant. Her impatience to be delivered from a state of suspense must have favoured an immediate application. Yet, without any assigned reason, she declined to

give an explanation—not only at that time, but also at the first banquet. What ever may have been Esther's design, the design of Providence is obvious. Had she at that time declared her request, Haman would not have had an opportunity of performing his part in the drama. This man of glory and of guilt must be allowed another scene on the stage of time to exhibit his character in all its bearings, and to show the disappointment and misery of the enemies of God. His vanity is not yet at the highest pitch; he must be brought to the pinnacle of vainglory. When he arrives on the summit of earthly magnificance next to majesty itself, he must grasp at the shadow of royal splendor—but in the grasp he must begin to totter to his fall. The crown he had devised to wear for a day, he must fix on the head of his greatest enemy. He must be made to minister to the man of God, whom he thought to destroy. Then shall he fall, never more to rise at all: he must prepare a gallows for Mordecai, but he must himself be hanged thereon.

Vanity of earthly glory

Thus it shall be with the proud and prosperous wicked. Though they may not, like Haman, meet a retribution in this world, their honour will be succeeded with everlasting shame and misery. From the pinnacle of earthly glory they shall be hurled into the depths of hell. This prosperity is not to be envied by the poorest Christian: "Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity. For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb" (Psa 37:1-2).

How vain is earthly glory! How irrational are the struggles of statesmen and courtiers for the giddy height of power! This moment their counsels may direct the destinies of nations; the next they may be hurled into the abyss of eternal misery. This day they may sit at the helm of empires; tomorrow they may appear before the dread tribunal of God. Now they are at the head of nobles and princes, and attract the notice of admiring millions; in an instant their souls may be required of them, and they may be covered with shame and everlasting contempt. Look at Haman. Was ever statesman or courtier more highly honoured and advanced? He is drunk with worldly glory, but his soul is still thirsty. To what purpose is he mounting yon dangerous height? It is that he may tumble into the abyss below. While his happiness appears to the beholder to be complete, his own bad passions make him miserable. Infamy and ruin hover over him while he ascends, and he falls as a monument of the vanity of earthly glory. What a sudden and dreadful reverse! What a lesson to all the children of pride! What an example to statesmen and courtiers!

No satisfaction from earthly enjoyments

We may here see also that, even in this world, the most successful ambition is always disappointed in the hope of happiness from the enjoyment of its object. The scholar, the man of science, the senator, the warrior, having gained the utmost eminence to which their throbbing hearts aspired, are not only unsatisfied with glory, but perhaps more miserable than the lowest of the class to which they belong. There is still something that makes disappointment prey on their souls. In all his glory Haman confessed himself miserable, on account of the disrespect of an insolent Jew.

> *"And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate" (5:11-13).*

All men are in pursuit of happiness, and all, by nature, seek it in the things of this world; but in them it never can be found. Even the acquisition of the things in which they suppose happiness to consist will disappoint them in the enjoyment. Man, at enmity with God, cannot be happy. The curse denounced

against sin has entwined itself with all human enjoyments. It is seen not only in the thorns and briars but also in the most voluptuous enjoyments of that royal luxury that crops the sweet buds of a terrestrial paradise. It lodges not only in the cottages of the poor, but seats itself on the thrones of princes. Solomon has found that all earthly enjoyments are but vanity of vanities (Ecc 1:2).

Sinner, return to God through Jesus Christ. There is no real happiness either in this world or the next, but in the favour of Him from Whom you fly. Ye children of pride, see in Haman the disappointment of your hopes! How unsatisfactory are your present enjoyments! How soon must you exchange your earthly splendour for the abodes of endless and unmixed misery! The basest of your menials, if he knows the Saviour of sinners, is a happier man than you. Seek happiness, then, where it is to be found: in the knowledge of God. "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (Joh 1:29). Until you are delivered from your sins, the curse of God rests on you, and divine wrath must pursue you both in this world and the next. Lay them on the head of the Lamb of God, and be free from guilt, pollution, and misery. "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1Jo 1:7).

True joy

Mordecai, with the threat of death against himself and his whole nation before his eyes, was evidently a happier man from confidence in the divine protection, than Haman in the midst of the unbounded profusion of royal power. The children of God are, indeed, frequently sorrowful, but, paradoxical as the assertion may appear, if they enjoy their privileges, *they are always rejoicing*. "Though now, for a season, if need be, they are in heaviness, through manifold trials, yet even now they rejoice with a joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1Pe 1:8). They endure as seeing Him Who is invisible. Moses chose "rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect to the recompence of reward" (Heb 11:24-26). Even in the midst of all the afflictions to which he may be called for Christ's sake, the Christian has peace and joy. He is given strength for his day—faith in proportion to his trials.

> *"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you" (1Pe 4:12-14).*

g. Mordecai's Exaltation

In this history of providential interposition, there is nothing more wonderful than the process that leads to the exaltation of Mordecai. We already noticed the circumstances that put him in the way of royal notice. He had discovered a conspiracy against the life of the king. But why was he not rewarded immediately on the discovery? Why was he so long neglected or forgotten by the king? The smallest services to majesty usually meet an immediate and a magnificent retribution. Why was the greatest service that could be rendered to man overlooked till it was entirely forgotten? Is the saving of the life of a sovereign of so little estimation? Are absolute monarchs wont to disregard the saviours of their lives? Shall such profusion of royal bounty be showered on the head of Haman, while Mordecai remains unrewarded? What can account for this strange conduct? One thing can account for it, and nothing but this can be alleged as sufficient cause: the thing was overruled by Providence for the fulfillment of the divine purposes. God not only works His will through the actions of all men, *but their very abstaining from action* is employed by Him for the same purpose. Had Mordecai been suitably rewarded at the time of his service, there would have been no opportunity for the wickedness of Haman, and the danger of

Mordecai, to be so wonderfully manifested. Had Mordecai been already advanced, Haman would not have sought his ruin. But by the delay, Haman was insulted, and Mordecai is brought to the brink of ruin from the wrath of the haughty favourite. Who is so blind as not to see the hand of God in this?

But if the reward of Mordecai at the time of his service would have been unsuitable to God's design in manifesting the wickedness of Haman, and His own power in the defense of His people, to have delayed it for a single day longer would have been ruin to the unbending Jew. His immediate death is planned by his enemies, and the next day would have seen him hanged on a gallows fifty cubits high. Haman was to ask the life of his enemy from the king, and to ask it was to obtain it.

> *"Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made" (5:14).*

Mordecai, what miracle shall deliver thee now? Shall God speak from heaven, or destroy thine enemies with His thunder? Shall the earth open and swallow them up that seek thy life? Shall the angels of the Lord carry thee away, and hide thee from thy pursuers? No! thy God will save thee by His providence, in a way suitable to the rest of His conduct manifested in this book. Death hovers over thy head, but it shall not strike thee; the wings of Providence shall overshadow thee and turn aside the dart; thou shalt have both life and glory without a miracle. But if thou was neglected at the time of so eminent service, what probability is there that thou shalt now be thought of ? What friend of thine shall thy God send to the king, to remind him that he owes thee his life? Who shall put him in mind of his obligation at this critical moment? Another day and thou art a dead man!

But thy God is not asleep nor unmindful of thee in the time of danger. What is it that He cannot make the minister of His mercy to His servants? A remarkable interposition of His providence shall bring thee into notice this very night. Though thou hast no friend to speak for thee, thy God shall cause the thoughts of the king to roam in the paths where he shall find thy claims displayed. Even in the unseasonable hour of night, the memorial of thy good deed shall come before him. The king lies down, but he cannot sleep; nor shall he sleep till he hears of Mordecai.

Providence even in trivial events

Let us here learn to trace the hand of God in the most trivial events. There is nothing fortuitous, nothing without God.

> *"On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records by the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus. And the king said, What honour and dignity hath been done to Mordecai for this? Then said the king's servants that ministered unto him, There is nothing done for him" (6:1-3).*

Astonishing! "On *that* night!"—O gentle sleep, why didst thou forsake the king's couch on that critical night? There is indeed nothing strange to find thee leaving the bed of state, and fluttering with thy downy wings over the sooty cribs in the cottages of hard industry. But why did thy caprice choose to leave the couch of majesty in the critical moment? Didst thou not act as the minister of heaven? Sleep, it was *God* drove thee on that night from the bed of Ahasuerus.

Who would think of ascribing to God so seemingly an unimportant a matter? Yet this link is essential in the chain of the wonderful providences by which the Ruler of the world executed His plan on this memorable occasion. Take this away, and the whole chain is useless. Another night would have seen Mordecai on the gallows or in the grave. This fact teaches us that there is nothing really casual as to God, even in a restless night of a human creature. How wonderful is the providence of Jehovah! How minute, how amazingly diversified are its operations! The eye of the Lord beholds, and His wisdom directeth, *all the events* with respect to *all the creatures* in the universe. This would be too much trouble and too

mean[40]an employment for the god of the philosophers. But the God of the Scripture not only created all things at first, and established laws by which He governs them, but He continually worketh in His providence. It is in Him we live, and move, and have our being (Act 17:28). It is by His immediate power that creation is sustained in existence, that every function of animal life is performed, and that every motion in the universe is effected.

The blindness and enmity of the mind of man wish to put Him at a distance, and to consider Him no farther the Governor of the world than as the author of the general laws of nature according to which all events take place. But the Bible brings God before us in all things that occur. Of the innumerable insects that inhabit a blade of grass, there is not one whose vital functions are not carried on by the power of God. To Him the lion roars for his prey, and He feedeth the ravens. He ever works without weariness. Epicurus[41]removed his gods to a distance from the earth, that they might feast without disturbance from the tumults of men. He gave them a luxurious ease, far above the clouds, and did not interrupt their festivities with the government of the world. And an infidel philosophy in modern times does nearly the same, under the name of Christianity, by ascribing to God *only* what it calls a *general* providence. *This is not the God of the Bible*. The Christian may recognize his God as shining in the sun, breathing in the air, and living in all life. His immediate power is as necessary to sustain all things in existence, and to effect every change in their state, as it was to create them at first. His providence is as necessary for the care of a microscopic insect as for the regulating of the motions of a solar system.

Why then, Monarch of the east, did thy sleep forsake thee on that memorable night? When it fled, why didst thou not pursue it, and with thy instruments of music force it back to thy royal chamber? Call thy minstrels and woo it with softest sounds of sweetest melody; lure it to thy couch with the voice of song. Come forth, ye harmonious choirs; raise your most enchanting airs and lull your monarch in repose. Tell me, you wise men of the world, why nothing could amuse the king at this time but the chronicles of his kingdom? Is this the usual requiem of an eastern monarch? Is a dry register of facts a likely expedient to hush the restless thoughts and induce the gentler influences of sleep? Tell me, Ahasuerus, why that thought passed across thy mind at this time? Where shall I find its origin? Out of a million of millions of thoughts, this appears the least likely to strike thee at such a time. Thou art silent, O monarch! of this thou knowest no more than the bed on which thou dost lie. It came, but whence it came thou knowest as little as thou dost of the birthplace of the wind.

And why didst thou yield to it when it came? What made thy free will to indulge this thought? Was not the thought thine own? Was not compliance with its suggestions thine own action? Of this it is impossible for thee to doubt. How then can this thy thought be ascribed to God? In what mysterious sense can this action be the appointment of God? All is light, yet all is mystery. The facts are as certain and as obvious as the mind of man can wish, yet *to adjust their boundaries* is as impossible as to draw a line between the colours of the rainbow. The most obvious truths may be incomprehensible to man. This thought, and the action that was its result, are the king's; yet they are the instruments through which the Almighty Ruler of the world performs His purpose. Take these away, and you destroy the whole chain of Providence exhibited in the *Book of Esther*.

But even when the book of the chronicles comes, are there not a thousand chances that *the suitable part* may not turn up? What directed the reader to the proper place? In so extensive a subject as the annals of the Persian empire, what probability is there that the reader will happen on the few lines that record the service of Mordecai? He might have read till morning without touching this subject. What finger guided him to this story? Is it not more likely that the curiosity of the king would prompt him to hear some of the transactions of former reigns? This was the hour for the deliverance and exaltation of Mordecai, and it was the finger of God that pointed to the record of his service. Every step we advance in this wonderful history, we see a display of an overruling Providence. The *Book of Esther* is a book of

wonders without a miracle.

The king hears the record of the conspiracy, and enquires about the reward of Mordecai's services. He takes it for granted that he must have received a suitable recompense in honour and dignity, but finds that he is yet unrewarded! Strange! very strange! inexplicably strange! But God's design is clear. The divine plan required that Mordecai's exaltation should be delayed till now. But it shall be delayed no longer. God's providence requires that this very moment Mordecai shall be raised; for Haman is at the door to demand his life. Keep Mordecai's services another hour unknown to the king and the servant of God is given into the hand of the enemy. How injudiciously are royal favours often conferred! The man who deserved of the king more than any subject in his empire is neglected, while that worthless minion, Haman, rose almost to royal honours!

Duty to rulers

In the preservation of the life of the king, we may learn the duty of the servants of God to their chief rulers. Mordecai was in the land of the captivity of his people, yet, instead of forwarding a scheme for the murder of the sovereign, he saved him by a discovery of his danger. Christians ought to stand at the utmost distance from every scheme that tends to overturn or embarrass civil government. Their duty and safety in every country demands submission to the ruling powers.

Contentment and gratitude

There is something worthy of admiration in the courage of Mordecai during the time of his being neglected after his important service. We find no unbecoming intrusion on the notice of majesty, no cringing at the knees of Haman and the minions of court, to forward his claims to preferment. Yet, when honours came, they are received without any affectation of social indifference; he appears in the splendour of royalty, and becomes greater and greater in the Persian empire. Unlike an Aristides[42]or a Diogenes, he spurns not the favour of the king, nor returns a rude reply to the kindness of majesty. A Christian ought never to show himself lower than an heir of heaven; but to affect[43]a disregard to all worldly comfort is the affectation of philosophic pride.

While in Mordecai we find something to blame, we may find in him much more to praise. God accepted him as His servant, though he was ignorant of some points of duty. In him we find the strongest faith in the divine protection, and the most heroic devotedness to the cause of God and His people. Should not this be a lesson to us all? And while we faithfully bear our testimony against errors of every kind, let us be willing to acknowledge the servants of God in all the various denominations where they are to be found. We have all our own errors; and though this ought not to induce us to look on error as innocent, it ought to keep us from despising the weakest of the people of God. Is it not a most surprising thing, that any Christian can find a difficulty in recognizing those whom *God* has recognized and sealed with His Holy Spirit?

Intricate timing and detail

At the critical moment of the king's enquiries about Mordecai, Haman had come into the outward court, to solicit for his immediate execution. Mark the Lord of providence in every step. Had not the king been kept from sleep, had not the book of records been called for his amusement, had not the account of the conspiracy turned up to the reader—Mordecai would now have been given into the hand of his enemy.

Mark the providence of God, also, in having Haman at hand, that by *his* mouth the honours of Mordecai might be awarded, and that by his instrumentality they might be conferred. Why did the king think of referring the reward of Mordecai to another? Why did he not himself determine the dignities to be conferred on his preserver? Or, if he refers to another, why did he not immediately leave the matter to those now about him? Why does he ask, Who is in the court? Why was Haman there at this moment? Why was he the only one that waited so early on the king? Why did Ahasuerus put the question in such a manner as to conceal the object of the royal favour? Why does the king, instead of plainly naming Mordecai, use the periphrasis[44]"the man whom the king delights to honour"? Why did this form of the question allow Haman to suppose that he was himself the happy man for whom the honours were intended? At this time the king knew nothing of the designs of Haman, and had no design to ensnare him. Every circumstance here is wonderfully providential. From this we see that *God can make the greatest enemies of His people the means of advancing their interests*. Whom then ought the Christian to fear, but God?

h. Haman's Fall

Behold the retributive justice of God in the death of Haman! One of the chamberlains, who probably had seen the gallows when he went to call him to the feast, mentioned that Haman had prepared it in his house to hang Mordecai. "The king said, Hang him thereon" (7:9).

But we are not yet done with the wonders of Providence in this affair. Even with all the good intentions of the king, how can the Jews be preserved? The first decree could not be revoked; how then could a handful of Jews, scattered over all the provinces of the empire, stand up against their enemies in all nations? Although they had the royal license to defend themselves and destroy their adversaries, how could one small nation, so widely dispersed, escape destruction when impunity invited the assault and instigated malice? Their escape is secured by the awe inspired into the nations by the elevation of Mordecai. The God Who so often filled the hearts of the most numerous armies with the dread of His people, few in number, now filled the nations of the Persian empire with the fear of them.

> *"The Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the king Ahasuerus, to lay hand on such as sought their hurt: and no man could withstand them; for the fear of them fell upon all people. And all the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, and the deputies, and officers of the king, helped the Jews; because the fear of Mordecai fell upon them. For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces: for this man Mordecai waxed greater and greater. Thus the Jews smote all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and slaughter, and destruction, and did what they would unto those that hated them" (9:2-5).*

Fear not the malice of your enemies, ye children of the Most High. Your God can deliver you out of their hands. Lift up your heads, Christians, for your redemption draweth nigh. Ye shall yet have "light, and gladness, and joy, and honour" (8:16).

Preservation of the Church

But in the *Book of Esther* we are not only to attend to the wonderful interpositions of Providence manifested in the facts of history. From the manner of revelation, in innumerable other instances, we are warranted to consider this history as prophetical and typical. In the deliverance of the Jews on this occasion, we may see God's method of *preserving His Church* in the time of the fourth beast, and *the final triumph of the saints* of the Most High. When the Reformation opened the gates of Babylon, many Christians have remained there or in some of its provinces. They are thus exposed to loss and danger, but they shall not be destroyed. Their enemies plot their ruin, but the mischief will ultimately fall on their own heads. In Haman we see a striking type[45]of the Man of Sin: he seeks to destroy the whole Israel of

God, but his effort will only bring on his own ruin. All must honour this wicked Haman. He indeed seeks divine honours, and there is a temptation here to stretch the type to the antitype,[46]and find Haman guilty of claiming divine worship. But this is not in evidence, and there is no necessity that there should in all things be a perfect correspondence between the type and the antitype. This likeness is seen sufficiently in the honours that his imagination suggested for "the man whom the king delights to honour," when he supposed that he was himself the person. It is astonishing that he presumed to award royal honours to any subject of the empire. Was not this likely to awaken the jealously of a despot? Yet such was the arrogance of this Man of Sin, that Haman answered the king,

> *"For the man whom the king delighteth to honour, Let the royal apparel be brought which the king useth to wear, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the crown royal which is set upon his head: And let this apparel and horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man withal whom the king delighteth to honour, and bring him on horseback through the street of the city, and proclaim before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honour" (6:7-9).*

Can there be a more correct figure of the blasphemous pretension of the Man of Sin, who has usurped the honours of God? These honours, however, were without scruple awarded to Mordecai by the king.

> *"Then the king said to Haman, Make haste, and take the apparel and the horse, as thou hast said, and do even so to Mordecai the Jew, that sitteth at the king's gate: let nothing fail of all that thou hast spoken" (6:10).*

And if Mordecai is a type of the Son of God, how justly were these honours awarded! The Father delights to have Him honoured even as Himself.

In the unchangeable laws of the Medes and the Persians, we may see one of the features of the kingdom of the Man of Sin (Popery), whose infallible decrees cannot be altered. Yet notwithstanding the irreversible decree that determines the destruction of all heretics, the providence of God has made other provisions for their safety. The decree never dies, but it may slumber. Other laws may be made by the state to counteract it.

In the fall of Haman, let us anticipate the overthrow of all the opposers of the kingdom of Christ. All the schemes devised for overturning Christianity will not only prove abortive, but will finally bring down vengeance on the heads of their authors.

We may here see how God can bring down the Man of Sin by the ordinary course of providence, without employing a single miracle. He can make His very enemies the instruments of effecting His designs. By them He usually cuts off those whom He devotes to temporal destruction; and by them also He can deliver His own people. When Haman was cut off, "many of the people of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews fell upon them" (8:17). How well does this correspond with the increase of the true kingdom of Christ by genuine converts, when destruction shall have fallen on mystical Babylon! No king but the Messiah can reign in the midst of His enemies, and perform His will by those who design to oppose it.

4. An Inspired Record

a. Internal Evidence

This history—which has been thought by some unworthy of a place among the inspired writings—discovers, when attentively considered, the most surprising series of events brought about without a miracle, that ever was exhibited to the consideration of the human mind. Among the most admired works of genius, of all ages and countries, we will not find that the invention of man has been able to form a story, and connect a series of surprising events, like this true history. Homer, Virgil, Milton, and all the writers of epic poetry, have been obliged to use supernatural agency upon all critical occasions. To interest their readers, they must depart from the ordinary course of nature and employ means that never really existed. Gods, demons, and muses are so necessary to the poet, that they still have their impression on the phraseology of poetry. If you prevent him from invoking the inspirations of his muse, from conversing familiarly with Apollo and the nine, from mounting to the top of Parnassus, and from drinking of the Pierian spring, you deprive him of the chief resources of his art. But the *Book of Esther* presents us with the most interesting and surprising narrative; it gives us a series of wonders in producing danger and deliverance, yet the means employed are so much in the ordinary course of nature that a careless reader scarcely perceives the hand of the Lord. Every event appears the natural and obvious result of the situation in which it is produced, but to create and combine these situations is as truly a work of divine wisdom and power as to create the world or to fix the laws of nature. It is *thus* God rules the world; He is continually working, yet blind men perceive Him not. Nature or chance is worshipped instead of Him whose power is necessary to the life, motion, and existence of every being.

This book, then, whose inspiration has lately been called into question by ignorance speaking from the chair of learning, commends its claims to me, in the most convincing manner, by *itsown internal evidence*. No human pen could have produced it. The characteristic feature, which I have pointed out, proves it to be a child of God. Had man been its author, it would have been crowded with miracles. I challenge the world to produce anything resembling it in this point from the writings of uninspired men.

b. No Human Gratification

There is another feature in this history that proves it to be of heavenly birth. *There is no instance in which it gratifies mere curiosity.* While it informs us of facts, it informs us no farther than they contribute to the design of the Holy Spirit and are important for instruction. In this feature it shows its resemblance to the teaching of our Lord and to the writings of the Apostles. So far from gratifying idle curiosity, our Lord declined compliance with respect to some points in which human wisdom would think it important to be informed. His communications manifest a striking reserve; and even when pressed, He could not be induced to reply to any curious questions. In the writings of the evangelists and the Apostles, how often do we wish that they had been a little more communicative. And, assuredly, had they spoken from their own wisdom, they would have made a larger Bible.

Now, with this in his view, let anyone read the *Book of Esther*. In how many points do we wish more information! Facts are stated simply, where we would wish to see them standing in connection with their origin. To see this argument illustrated in a striking light, let anyone cast his eye over Gill's *Commentary* on this book, that he may see, from the Talmuds[47]and Rabbinical writings, the additional information

that human wisdom seeks in vain in the Book of God. There is not one point interesting to curiosity but what is supplied by their traditions or their conjectures. Had the *Book of Esther* been written by the wisdom of men, it would have manifested its origin by gratifying curiosity in a similar way. Let us illustrate this remark by a reference to a few particulars in this history. The first I shall mention is the account of Mordecai's conduct in reference to the marriage of Esther. How human wisdom endeavours to justify or excuse him in this business, may be seen by looking into almost any of the commentaries. But this history relates the fact without any observation either in justification or condemnation of him. We are left to acquit or blame him according to the light of the Scriptures.

With respect to the conspiracy against the life of the king, who is it that would not wish a little more information? What uninspired writer would not have given us at least a sketch of the cause of the discontent of the conspirators, and of the means by which it was discovered to Mordecai? What a human author would have done on this subject, we may see from what human wisdom has actually supplied. Dr. Gill tells us that the Jewish writers say that the two conspirators were Tarsians, and spake in the Tarsian language, supposing that Mordecai did not understand it, but that he being skilled in languages, understood what they were saying. According to Josephus, it was discovered to Mordecai by Barnabazus, a servant of one of the chamberlains. The latter Targum says that it was revealed unto him by the Holy Spirit, but the Spirit of God, speaking by the writer of the *Book of Esther*, deigns not to inform us how Mordecai came to know the matter. He only declares that the thing was known to Mordecai.

The account of the rise of Haman affords us another specimen of this divine wisdom. In giving an account of the rise of a favourite, every historian informs us of the ground of his acceptance with his sovereign; but not one word on this heard here. We are merely told, "After these things did king Ahasuerus promote Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes that were with him" (3:1).

Whether the conduct of Mordecai, in refusing to reverence Haman, was blamable or justifiable, and the grounds on which he acted, are things that no human author would have overlooked. But whether he was right or wrong, or what was the principle on which he refused obedience in this instance to the royal mandate, this book says nothing. It merely states the fact: "But Mordecai bowed not, nor did him reverence." In order to justify him, the Targum and Aben Ezra[48]say that Haman had a statue erected to himself, and had images painted on his clothes. Dr. Gill, who does not rely on this, strains hard to make out a good case for his client, from the passage itself and from conjecture. He thinks Haman claimed divine honours because they were given to the Persian kings, and *might have been* given to their favourites. But this "might have been" is a very bad foundation for an argument, though it is sufficient to remove a difficulty in a case that is attested by other credible testimony. This disposition to acquit the hero in an interesting narrative, in every part of his conduct, whatever may be its success in this instance, proves clearly that if the writer had not been guided by divine wisdom, he would have given us a few remarks in justification of Mordecai.

The last instance to which I shall allude is the account of the affair that brought Mordecai into royal notice. We are not told what diverted the monarch from sleeping, nor what induced him to call for the book of the chronicles of his kingdom, nor what led to the reading of one passage more than another. Human wisdom would have gratified us on all these points, but the Spirit of God says no more than,

> *"On that night could not the king sleep, and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles; and they were read before the king. And it was found written, that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hand on the king Ahasuerus" (6:1-2).*

c. The Authority of the Canon

But though I perceive internal evidence in this book confirming its authenticity and inspiration, I do

not submit to the dogma on which some modern critics seem to act: that the authority of the canon is not sufficient to entitle a book to be admitted to the rank of inspiration, and that it is necessary for each book to be separately tried on the independent evidence from its own contents. Modern critics, in acting on this principle, resemble the lawyers who excite litigation in order to obtain clients. They have an opportunity of displaying the treasures of their learning and the reach of their ingenuity, in defending the claims of Scripture without the authority of the canon. In judging of this internal evidence, they lay down first principles that are not entitled to that rank, and overlook first principles that demand universal respect. A first principle of the latter description is that testimony is a sound source of evidence, and that the books of Scripture are to be received on the authority of the canon. In ascertaining whether the *Book of Esther*, among other books, is inspired, we have to inquire, Was it in the collection called Scripture in the days of our Lord? If it was, its inspiration is past dispute. Jesus Christ recognized the Jewish Scripture as the Word of God. The Apostle Paul represents it as one of the chief privileges of the Jews, that they are the depositories to whom were entrusted the oracles of God, and neither the Apostles nor their Master charged them with unfaithfulness in their trust. Now, the *Book of Esther*, as Dr. Gill observes, has been generally received as canonical, both by Jews and Christians. "It stands," he says, "in Origen's[49]catalogue of the books of the Old Testament; nor is it any material objection that it appears not in the catalogue of Melita, since in that list is comprehended under *Ezra*, not *Nehemiah* only but *Esther* also, which Jerome mentions along with it."

d. The Name of God

As in rejecting the inspiration of this book, some modern theologians disclaim a first principle entitled to the most confident reception, so they admit some first principles that are mere fragments of the imagination. Why is the *Book of Esther* denied as a book of Scripture?—because it has not the name of God in its whole compass. Here it is taken, as a first principle, that no book can be inspired that does not contain the name of God. But where have they got this axiom? It is not self-evident, nor asserted by any portion of Scripture, and is therefore entitled to no respect. Whether a book may be inspired, though the name of God is not mentioned in it, depends not on any self-evident first principles, but on matter of fact. And matter of fact determines in this instance, that a book may be inspired, although it does not express the name of God.

This objection, though it affects an appearance of wisdom, manifests a very inadequate conception of the nature of the Word of God. It considers every book in the collection as an independent whole, standing unconnected with the other books. But the Bible is like the human body; all the books together form one whole, and there is no reason that one book should serve the place of another more than that the hand or the foot should perform the duty of the eye or of the ear. It is enough if the whole will of God is learned from the Book as a whole. If it is contended that every book of Scripture *must* contain the name of God, a like demand may be made with respect to every chapter, or any small division. The prophecy of Obadiah contains but one chapter; must it prove its divine origin by containing a whole body of divinity? Let the Christian form his views of the characteristics of Scripture from itself, and not from the arbitrary conceits of his own mind.

But if God is not expressly named in this book, He is most evidently referred to by periphrasis, and the strongest confidence in Him is manifested by Mordecai. The faith of that illustrious servant of God is among the most distinguished examples that Scripture affords.

> *"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?" (4:13-14).*

Is not this a reference to God, and to confidence in Him as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? "From another place"—can there be any doubt as to the place from which he expected deliverance? Is not this an obvious reference to *God* ? Does not this reasoning to persuade Esther express the fullest confidence that the Jews eventually would be delivered, though the danger was so great and so inevitable that no human eye could discern the means of preservation should not Esther undertake the intercession? As Abraham counted Him faithful Who had promised, and believed that though Isaac should die on the altar he should by him be the father of the Messiah, so Mordecai believed that when every apparent means of safety failed, God would on this occasion be the Deliverer of Israel. Is it not from the retributive[50]justice of God that he threatens destruction to Esther and her father's house, should she decline the intercession through unbelief? The very Providence that is illustrated in this book is exhibited in the faith of Mordecai. He looked for deliverance through means, and if all apparent means should fail, still he believed that Providence would raise up means.

How clearly and strongly is this view of Providence expressed in the question to Esther: "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (4:14). He justly concluded from the occurrence of such a danger, that the reason why Providence had raised her to the rank of queen was to be the deliverer of her people. Mordecai's view of Providence is that which is inculcated in all the wonderful events of this singular narrative. It is the view of Providence that I wish to press on all my brethren in Christ. If times of trouble are before us, what better preparation for it than the study of the *Book of Esther*? If the great Antichrist, under any form, is yet to meditate the destruction of the whole Israel of God—if there is any just apprehension from the prophecies of Scripture that great calamities are still before the Church of Christ—ought not every Christian to be nourishing his faith with this wonderful display of Providence, as the Deliverer of those who put their trust in Him? Surely there can be no harm in watchfulness and apprehension when the enemies of the cross are so rapidly increasing, and when indecision and lukewarmness so fearfully characterize the great body of the people of God. All the other symptoms of danger are not so dreadfully alarming as that spurious liberality that begins to look with complaisance on the enemies of Christ—an affectation of that love of man that manifests disaffection to some parts of the character of God.

Esther also manifests confidence in God and a resolution to die for His people, if that should be the result of her application in their favour. She approaches the king, not confiding in her charms nor hoping to escape destruction from the love or pity of a husband, but in the way of *divine appointment* in the time of danger by much fasting and prayer. This is an exhibition of a true servant of God. The power of Jehovah and the love of His people are strongly manifested in the conduct of these two illustrious Israelites. If God is not mentioned by name, He is seen in all their conduct.

In the exhibition of the conduct of Esther on this occasion, we have a strong internal evidence of inspiration. Had human wisdom formed a heroine, it would have been likely to represent her from the first moment as intrepid and ready to encounter the greatest dangers with more than masculine bravery. But Esther is not presented to us in this light by this history. She comes before us in the usual character of her sex, and for the ordinary attainment in the divine life. She at first declines the hazardous undertaking for fear of losing her life. Her timidity is overcome by such arguments as ought to influence a believer in the God of Abraham, and she finally displays resignation and confidence, though not altogether unmixed with fear. Such is the usual conduct, such is the usual confidence, of the people of God.

This book, then, which exhibits the providence of God, is composed in a manner suited to its subject. God is everywhere seen in it, though He is not named. Just so God is every moment manifesting Himself in the works of His providence, though He works unseen to all but the eye of faith. He supports and moves the heavenly bodies, while His name is not expressly written on the sun, moon, or stars, and though no herald voice proclaims Him in the execution of His office. The Christian also has many ways

of acknowledging God, without expressly naming Him. The sun, from the time he rises till he sets in silence, preaches the God that made and upholds him—and the *Book of Esther*, from the beginning to the end, proclaims the providence of God, though it does not expressly name Him.

But not only is the objection invalid, but every one of the same class is utterly unworthy of respect. A book may disprove its divine origin by what it contains, but in no case by what it does not contain. What is to be expressed in any divine communication, is not for man presumptuously to determine by his own wisdom, but lies entirely with a sovereign God. We may as well say that God would not make the sun or moon without writing His name on it, as that He could not inspire a book that did not contain His name. Vain man will be wise, though he is born as the wild ass's colt (Job 11:12). Even in the things of God he must, by his own maxims of wisdom, pronounce on the authenticity of the inspiration of the All-wise!

e. Not Quoted in the New Testament

Another objection alleged to the inspiration of this book is that it is not quoted in the New Testament. Now, who made this a first principle? What authority establishes the dogma that a book of the Old Testament cannot be inspired unless it is quoted in the New? Is it a self-evident truth? by no means! Does the New Testament teach this doctrine? no such thing! Where then has it obtained its authority? in the presumption of man! To be quoted in the New Testament is indeed proof of the inspiration of a book of the Old, and may therefore be used very properly as a confirmation; but not to be quoted is no proof of a want of inspiration. The inspiration of the Old Testament is independent even in the existence of the New. Many books of the Old Testament, indeed, are quoted in the New; but this does not discredit such as are not quoted. To make quotations by the New Testament essential to the recognition of the inspiration of the books of the Old Testament is as unreasonable as to demand the quotation of every chapter and of every verse. It is perfectly sufficient that there is nothing in the *Book of Esther* that contradicts the New Testament. As far as they teach on the same things, they perfectly agree. To the inspiration of the *Book of Esther* there is not one objection that deserves a minute's consideration; it bears in every page the impression of the finger of God.

f. Questioning the Canon

The opinion that the settling of the canon is a matter of criticism, and lies fairly open to discussion, is a wicked and pernicious error. It is the suggestion of Satan to upset the authority of the whole Scriptures. It is impossible to deny the inspiration of one book of Scripture on principles that will not overturn any other. If the *Book of Esther* is to be rejected because it does not express the name of God, then any person is equally at liberty to reject any other book, because it wants something that his wisdom thinks an inspired book ought to contain. That an inspired book must express the name of God, is a principle as arbitrary, and as far from self-evident, as any conceit that the human mind may entertain. If, then, its authority is acknowledged, equal indulgence must be granted to every other demand of human wisdom. If the *Book of Esther* is to be rejected because it is not quoted in the New Testament, then there is not a book in the New Testament that must not be rejected, because there is no inspired authority quoting them. And, by consequence, every book of the Old must also be rejected, because the recognition of it in the New will in that case be of no authority. If the books of the New Testament can on sufficient grounds be received as inspired, although the canon is not settled by the quotations of inspired authority, then may the books of the Old Testament likewise. To reject one book, then, must admit principles that will overturn the inspiration of all. The settling of the canon is not a matter of criticism, but of testimony; and however mortifying it may be to the pride of the learned, they must receive it on the same grounds with

the illiterate. The man of literature may indeed go a step or two beyond the unlearned. He may examine the books in which the testimony is contained, and with his own eyes he may read the catalogues of Origen and Melito,[51]with any other accessible evidence. But even here he must rest on testimony. He has not seen the original manuscripts; and though he possess the very autographs[52]of the Apostles, he must depend on testimony that they *are* really such. The canon of Scripture, then, the critic is not to ascertain by the rules of his art, but he must take it on the authority of testimony, and commence with it as a first principle.

It may appear surprising to some that the Christian public has not been more shocked with the late attempts to shake the authority of the canon, and to displace so great a portion of the Word of God from its high rank. But the reason is obvious, from the quarter from which these attempts have proceeded. Had the reasons that some have alleged for rejecting the *Book of Esther*, the two books of *Chronicles*, and the *Song of Solomon*, been urged by professed infidels or noted heretics, they would have been rejected with horror. But when they have been ushered into the world from the pens of reputedly orthodox divines, [53]and, for anything I know to the contrary, men of real godliness, the sinfulness of the attempt and the danger of the principle on which the opinion is founded, have been concealed from general notice. The very grounds of rejection have a show not only of wisdom, but of concern for the honour of God and His Word.

Satan appears as an angel of light (2Co 11:14) when he teaches that the *Book of Esther* should be rejected because it does not express the name of God, and because it is not quoted by the New Testament. What zeal does this manifest for the honour of God! what a high regard for the authority of the New Testament! Baxter[54]says that the Jews were in the habit of casting the *Book of Esther* to the ground before reading it, to express their sense of its deficiency in wanting the name of God; and the thought is quite in the style of Jewish piety, and of the human wisdom of Christians. It is just such a thought as Satan will likely to suggest to mistaken piety. But Satan conceals from them that, by their zeal for the honour of God, they rob themselves of all the advantages of that book. They do not see that they give up to him all the treasures of the knowledge of Providence that are contained in that precious record. He gives them a bauble, as the Europeans have done to barbarians, and he takes from them the most valuable diamonds. Satan suggests that the *Book of Esther* cannot be a book of Scripture, because it is not quoted in the New Testament. Who would think that the infernal spirit of darkness has such a respect for the writing of the Apostles? Arch-deceiver! thy respect is affected for the purpose of overturning the writings for which thou dost profess this respect. Though the dupes who are deceived by thee perceive it not, thy keen eye discerns that this principle will overturn the Bible. When thou deceivest the profane and the ungodly, thou wilt employ a Carlisle[55]or a Taylor;[56]but when the children of God are to be robbed of a part of His Word, thou dost prefer an evangelical divine as the deceiver.

g. Philosophy

It is on this very principle that the grand deceiver has overturned the foundation of all knowledge through the affected wisdom of the philosopher. Perceiving that false first principles lead to every error, Des Cartes[57]resolved to take nothing for granted but the existence of his thoughts. He did not admit even his own existence as a first principle—even that must be proved from his thinking. Here he imagined he had a foundation for all knowledge. But in rejecting his own existence as a first principle, and other first principles equally entitled to respect, he laid the grounds of universal skepticism—on which Mr. Hume[58]afterwards built with such success. If nothing is self-evident but the existence of individual thoughts, no man has any evidence of the existence of anything but himself. Some of his followers never advanced farther than this. The Egoists believed in their own individual existence, but

with matchless fortitude, each of them refused to believe that there is any being in creation but himself.

Now this is just the spirit of modern efforts to rest the authority of the books of Scripture, not on the canon ascertained by testimony, but on their internal evidence. For the authority of a book of Scripture they seek a surer foundation than testimony, however unexceptionally ascertained. They reject the solid foundation on which God Himself has rested the authority of the canon, and have adopted a foundation that sinks from under the whole building. Like Des Cartes, they may themselves adopt many truths, notwithstanding their foundation will not bear them; but others, like the Egoists, may reject almost any part of the divine Word. This wisdom, then, is both dangerous and foolish. In pretending to add strength to the bulwarks of God, it takes away their foundation. To reject a sound first principle is equally injurious to truth as to admit a false one. Either of them lays a foundation for error.

5. Valuable Instruction

The *Book of Esther* abounds with valuable instructions. To rob the Christian of the edification and comfort that it affords, is to do him the most serious injury. When critics find themselves at a loss in a field in which to exer–cise their ingenuity, let them indulge their vanity on the writings of the ancient Greeks. Here let them gamble with the many fanatic movements, and approach as near as they choose to the opposite boundaries of credulity and skepticism—but let them cease from the Word of God! Let them not dare to put their unhallowed hand on the ark of Jehovah. Let the children of the Most High possess His Word in the utmost extent; let them possess it without addition. The curse of God is for both him that adds and him that diminishes.

a. The Hand of God in the Affairs of Men

One of the most conspicuous advantages afforded to the Christian by this book is that it gives him a commentary to all the events recorded in history, with respect to the rise and fall of empires, the prosperity and adversity of nations, the progress and persecution of the Church of Christ, and the exaltation and degradation of individuals. In reading history, people in general look no farther than to the motives, designs, and tendencies of human action. Some are contented with the knowledge of facts, without attempting to discover their source or to trace the connection of events. But in the *Book of Esther*, the Christian may learn to refer every occurrence in the world to the counsels of God, and to behold Him ruling with absolute sway amidst all the confusion of human agency, over all the purposes and actions of men and devils. In the afflictions of virtue, in the oppression of the righteous, in the prosperity of the wicked, in the insolence of power, in the persecution of truth, the philosopher finds it difficult to defend his god, and cannot defend him without making him different from the God of the Scriptures. He excuses his supineness[59]by bringing him forward to reward virtue in another state, by the unavoidable necessity imposed on Omnipotency through the establishment of general laws from which it is impossible to deviate.

But the *Book of Esther* teaches the Christian that the rise, progress, and triumph of the Man of Sin, as well as his decline and fall, are according to the purpose of the Almighty, the All-Wise, the Eternal. His glory is secured by the exertions of His enemies as well as by those of His friends. He raises up Haman and Pharaoh, as well as Esther and Moses. Such a God is too wonderful for the discovery or the approbation of human wisdom. This is too dazzling a light in which to view the divine character for any who are not taught of God, and who are not accustomed to submit in the most absolute manner to the decisions of His Word. It is only the eagle can gaze on the sun. Many of those who, in some measure, are taught of God, are too weak-sighted to look on Him in this blaze of light. They prefer to view Him through the dark glasses of some human system of theology. My fellow Christians! I entreat you, as you value the authority of God, as you regard your own edification, study the *Book of Esther*, and see your God *ruling even over sin*. Behold Him in all the wars of conquerors, in all the intrigues of courts, in all the changes of empires, in all the caprices of monarchs, in all the persecutions of truth—as well as in all the progress of the gospel.

The *Book of Esther* teaches us to see the hand of God not only in the great events of the world, but in all the transactions of men. It calls on us to see Him in every occurrence of every day in our lives; and to trust in Him for provision, protection, health, comfort, peace, and all the blessings of life. Innumerable dangers are around us every moment; it is only the arm of God can ward them off from us. The most

trifling accident might destroy us, as well as an earthquake; it is the watchfulness of Providence that must guarantee our safety. How then is this book calculated to nourish our gratitude, increase our dependence on God, and invigorate our confidence! As we need the All-mighty protection in all things, even when we see no danger; so even when the most terrible disasters threaten, He can defend. From how many evils has He delivered us in the course of our lives! How many wonders of Providence may we recount in our own escapes! Christians, study the *Book of Esther*, and view God on your right hand and on your left all the day long. See His watchful eye upon you and His guardian hand around you, both night and day.

> *"He will not suffer thy foot to be moved: He that keepeth thee will not slumber. Behold, He that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep. The LORD is thy keeper: the LORD is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The LORD shall preserve thee from all evil: He shall preserve thy soul. The LORD shall preserve thy going out and thy coming in from this time forth, and even for evermore" (Psa 121:3-8).*

In Esther's success we find encouragement to undertake the most dangerous service to which duty calls us. We are indeed to count the cost, and be willing to serve the cause of God at the expense even of life. But in this example, let us see that God is able to preserve us in doing His will, even when danger is most appalling. There may be safety in the midst of danger when we go forward in the path of duty—but death itself is preferable to disobedience. *If I perish, I perish*, is the spirit in which the people of God ought to encounter the most appalling dangers in doing His will. In this spirit, we can die in triumph, or live with joy and a good conscience.

If times of trouble are before us, if God is about to call His people to suffer for His sake, let us in the *Book of Esther* alleviate our sorrow with the consideration that God rules in the storm. He can disperse the darkest clouds; He can preserve us in the midst of the thunderbolts; so He can give us peace and joy in the most violent death. Is it not consolation that persecution is by *His* appointment, and that in the end it will turn out for His glory as well as our good (Rom 8:28)?

b. Enduring Persecution

Even persecution may be commissioned to benefit the Church of God. It may effect what prosperity has kept far away. It may bring Christians into one body, as they have the one Lord (Eph 4:4-6). Their common sufferings will tend to unite them, and the afflictions of the house of God will tend to its purification. The millions who are Christians only in name, and who now by their union with the people of God defile the temple and cramp the exertions of believers, may then take their proper place. The interests, prejudices, and habits of Christians combine to keep them in ignorance of the nature of Christ's kingdom, and of the laws and institutions with which He has furnished them. When worldly temptations seek to deceive, Christians may become more tractable,[60]and what they did not learn in the time of their peace, they may soon learn in a time of danger. A man may learn at the stake what he could not see in the pulpit.

c. Regulation of Zeal

The consideration that the whole course of affairs on earth is directed by the overruling hand of Providence, as it is kept so conspicuously before our eyes in this book, may be highly useful to Christians in regulating their zeal in the cause of God. The mountains that lie in the way of the gospel appear so impassable that any means which promise to facilitate the passage is sometimes eagerly employed without reference to the authority of divine appointments. The end is made to sanctify the means; evil is done that good may come; means are employed that God hath not ordained—that God hath forbidden. Any means are supposed warrantable, if it appears that the thing cannot otherwise be effected. It is to this

baneful principle that the union of the church with the world owes its origin.

The nations of the earth, in all their sins, are made a sort of Christians by name—and enjoy the ordinances appointed only for the people of God. In all the worshipping assemblies in Christendom, separate the disciples, and what a poor figure will they make in the eyes of the world! How would they support the gospel? To act on this principle would be, in the opinion of many, to banish Christianity from the earth. However reluctant some may be to desecrate the ordinances of Christ, they think they *must* do it or suffer Satan to triumph over Christ. They complain of the decay of religion, they pray for better times, they strive to breathe life into the dry bones, they warn sinners of their danger—but still they give *them* the ordinances of Christ, for they cannot work without them. Numbers are necessary for the existence of a sect, and Christ's ordinances must be misapplied in order to promote the system.

Now I intreat Christians who act on this principle, to consider what an affront it casts on the Head of the Church. Who is it that governs the world? Has the Lord Jesus given up to the devil the power He received from His Father after His resurrection? Does He not still hold all power in heaven and on earth (Mat 28:18)? Does not the *Book of Esther* show that His providence extends to all events? May they not learn here that their Lord directs the actions even of His enemies to fulfill His will? Look here, and behold a few scattered Jews defending themselves, and destroying their enemies in all the provinces of the Persian empire. In the cause of God, then, *let them employ no means but such as are sanctioned by the appointment of Christ*. Let the ark of God itself fall, rather than put a hand to it contrary to divine authority (1Ch 13:9-10).

d. Avoiding Nominal Christianity

It is from the same principle that such an eagerness is always discovered to enlist the authority of kings and rulers in the cause of Christ, although they themselves may give all the weight of their example to the kingdom of Satan. Christians in general seem to think that there is no hope of protection for Christianity from civil rulers unless they are nominally embodied in their ranks. For the sanction of power they barter the ordinances of Christ. In the *Book of Esther* let them learn that their Lord is the King of kings and Lord of lords, that *He rules in the midst of His enemies* (Psa 110:2), and that He can make the most tyrannical princes the protectors of His people when He pleases. Ahasuerus, who had by an irreversible decree doomed to destruction the whole people of God, was, without any conversion to God, without any proselytism to Judaism, made the most zealous friend that ever appeared in favour of the house of Abraham. He not only with the utmost zeal cooperated for their deliverance from the intended destruction, but gave up to them, to the immense injury of his kingdom, all their enemies in his dominions. He gave them unlimited authority to kill their enemies and spoil their substance. The kings of the earth are the ministers of God; as such they ought to be honored—but give them not the throne of the Lord Jesus Christ. If they are not Christians by being born again through faith in the great propitiation[61]made on the cross, and walk in newness of life, let them not be called Christians—give them not the ordinances of the house of God.

In the *Book of Esther* the conductors of the various religious societies ought to take a lesson. I am afraid there are few of them that do not need it. The craft, the management, the bartering of the Christian name that some of them have employed with neologians[62]and heretics for cooperation, money, and countenance, would induce one to think that they consider the Lord Jesus Christ to be dethroned, and that His friends must work without Him till the restoration. I rejoice in all the good done by any of them. I wish I could convince them that they will do the more good, the more closely they abide by the means afforded by the Head of the Church. Jesus rules on the earth as well as in heaven, and those who honour Him He will honour to do His will. What have the Samaritans to do in building the temple of God? Has

Christ lost command over the treasures of the earth, that we must have recourse to the bounty of Satan? He will give us his contribution, no doubt; but he will have a niche in the edifice in which a statue must be worshipped. It would be more pleasant for me to be bandying compliments with the religious world, than to incur their displeasure by acting as their censor—but wholesome admonition is better than praise. Though the generality may despise it, some Christians may receive benefit. They may be led to see that, in the propagation of the gospel, the Lord Jesus has no need of the countenance or cooperation of His enemies. The *Book of Esther* will teach them that He can effect His purposes, even through those ignorant of Him, without embodying them among His disciples.

e. Human Responsibility and Divine Sovereignty

In the *Book of Esther* the Christian may see the union of two things apparently irreconcilable: the free agency of man, and the overruling appointment of God. Philosophers have exhausted their ingenuity in endeavouring to fathom this abyss, but their line has proved too short. Some have erred with respect to both sides of the question. They have held that actions are not free, and that they are necessary in such a sense as to render man inexcusable in guilt. On this foundation some ground the duty of charity. If a man sins under a necessity of this kind, there is no propriety in blaming him for his conduct. In the *Book of Esther* we may see that man's actions are his own, yet that they are, in another point of view, the appointment of God. We see here that man is accountable and blamable when he sins, yet we see that these very sinful actions are the appointment of God to effect His own purposes.

The philosophers who contend for the freedom of human actions generally deny the eternal decrees of God, because their wisdom cannot reconcile these two things with one another. And must not the penetration of philosophers fathom the deep things of God? Proud worms! can nothing be true of God, but what your minds can penetrate?

In reading the writings of philosophers on this subject, nothing can be more evident than that one party has proved that men act freely, and that the other proves as clearly that the foreknowledge of God implies the certainty of all actions as they are foreknown. In so far each is right on his own side, but wrong as to the other. They will fight as long as the devil has use for the discussion, for, on their own principle, the dispute can never be settled. The human mind is not able to fathom the subject; they are struggling to grasp infinity; they are both right, and both wrong; truth lies between them; each of them has a hold of its skirt, but neither of them entirely possesses it; it cannot be seized, except it is believed without being comprehended. This removes it altogether out of the road of the philosopher, for he cannot receive anything for which he cannot account.

While the philosophers dispute and, under the specious name of lovers of wisdom, prove themselves fools, let the Christian, from the *Book of Esther*, behold the freedom of human actions in union with divine appointment. Let him not affect to strut in the buskins[63]of the schools and pretend to explain what on this subject he receives on the authority of God. Let him receive it because the Word of God exhibits it, not because his wisdom can fathom the depth of the divine counsels. The most illiterate man of God, who receives with meekness what the Scriptures lay before him, is, with respect to the deepest subjects of philosophy, a greater philosopher than any of the mere sons of science. They may seize truth by the garment and tear away a shred, but the Christian, believing the divine testimony, possesses the substance.

I am sorry to be obliged to remark that Christians, too, generally affect the philosopher on this subject. They have separated what God has joined together because they could not comprehend the union; and, from prepossession in favour of one part of truth, have been led to give up or explain away the other. Some, out of zeal for the doctrine of the freedom of the human will, have, in opposition to the

clearest testimony of Scripture, denied the decrees of God; while others, from a false zeal for the honour of the divine counsels, have denied the freedom of human action. Both of them, inconsistently with their character as Christians, act on the same principle of unbelief with the philosopher: they deny what they cannot comprehend! Like infidels, they assume it as a first principle, that nothing is to be received as truth that is not comprehensible to the mind of man.

When will Christians cease from their own wisdom? When will they in all things submit to the testimony of God? When will they practically admit that God may know, and therefore call upon them to believe, what they cannot comprehend? Will man never cease to make himself equal with God? Will the Christian never learn that he is nothing? Disciple of Jesus, go to the *Book of Esther* and acquaint yourself with the deepest point of philosophy. There see the solution of the question that has occupied the wise from the very cradle of philosophy, but which philosophy has never solved—which it is not capable of solving on any principle other than submission to the testimony of God. Degrade not your Master, my fellow Christians, by modeling His doctrine according to the profane speculations of the schools. If any man will be really wise, let him become a fool in the estimation of the world, that he may be wise in the estimation of his God (1Co 1:27).

Let us read the *Book of Esther*, and in the view of the overruling government of God, let us console ourselves in contemplating the melancholy prospect of this world in which the counsels of nations in every age are conducted by the enemies of God. We hear much of Christian nations and Christian rulers, but where is the nation in which the counsels of the ungodly do not prevail? Where is the government that is conducted strictly on Christian principles? Statesmen, it is true, seek to manage Christianity like every other state engine, and therefore affect to support it. But where is the assembly of legislators in which it is visible that the Lord God is feared as He ought to be feared? This is a gloomy subject for the contemplation of the man of God. But let him turn his eye to the *Book of Esther*, and behold the Lord God Omnipotent reigning (Rev 19:6) and working His will by the very instruments employed by Satan to defeat His purposes. God rules even in the counsels of the ungodly. God will glorify Himself even by the very empire of Satan.

It is a heart-rending thing to reflect on the sin and misery that prevail in this world. Let us relieve ourselves, in some measure, by this consideration, that God has done all things according to the counsel of His own will (Eph 1:11). Is the Almighty disappointed in His work of creation? Has Satan prevailed over Him because of his strength? Or will any real dishonour attach to God by the rebellion of men and angels? Impossible; away with the accursed thought! These clouds before my eyes are dark and lowering —I cannot penetrate that gloom; I see nothing but confusion and wretchedness. The very glory of this world is vanity; its highest enjoyments are unsatisfying. But though I cannot see through this dreadful darkness, I will look beyond it by the eye of faith. God reigns; and all things therefore must issue in the glory of His name and the happiness of His people.

Short Biography of Alexander Carson

Alexander Carson (1776-1844): Irish Baptist pastor and author; a Presbyterian pastor and a Greek scholar of the first order, he gradually adopted Baptist views; probably the leading scholar in the Baptist ranks in Britain, a voluminous writer, and profound reasoner. Called by some the "Jonathan Edwards of Ireland"; author of Baptism in Its Mode and Subjects Considered. Born in Annahone, near Stewartstown, County Tyrone, Ireland.

[1]**Styx** – river in ancient Greek mythology that formed the boundary between Earth and the Underworld (often called Hades).
[2]**immediate** – direct, without any intermediary or middle agent.
[3]**fowling-piece** – rifle designed for hunting birds.
[4]**end** – result.
[5]**ardor** – fiery intensity of feeling.
[6]**concatenation** – linking together in a series.
[7]**despot** – absolute ruler with absolute authority and great power.
[8]**intrepidity** – boldness; fearlessness; bravery.
[9]**consort** – wife of the reigning king.
[10]**sycophants** – persons who seek favor by flattering the wealth and influential.
[11]**stoicism** – Greek school of philosophy, founded by Zeno about 308 B.C., that believes human beings should repress emotion, be indifferent to pain or pleasure, and should calmly accept all occurrences as the unavoidable result of divine will or of the natural order.
[12]**Martin Luther** (1483-1546) – German Roman Catholic monk, theologian, university professor, and church reformer whose ideas inspired the Protestant Reformation and changed the course of Western civilization.
[13]**want** – lack.
[14]**deist** – one who holds the belief that God is distant, i.e., He created the universe but then left it to run its course on its own, following certain "laws of nature" that He had built into the universe.
[15]**seraglios** – harems.
[16]**palpably** – obviously; evidently; clearly (to the mind).
[17]**Thomas Scott** (1747-1821) – Anglican minister, born in Lincolnshire, England. His conversion came during correspondence and mentoring from John Newton (1725-1807). He is best known for his *Commentary on the Whole Bible.*
[18]**John Gill** (1697-1771) – Baptist minister, theologian, and biblical scholar. Author of *A Complete Body of Doctrinal and Practical Divinity*, *The Cause of God and Truth*, and his nine-volume *Expositions of the Old and New Testaments.* Born in Kettering, Northamptonshire, England.
[19]**canon** – from the Greek *kanon,* which meant "measuring stick," then "rule or standard," and finally a "list written in a column." In this sense it was applied to the list of books that the early churches acknowledged to be inspired and authoritative for the faith and life of a Christian.
[20]**Babylon** – Babylon is here used as a figure for this world of iniquity we live in.—*Editor*
[21]**approbation** – approval.
[22]**calumny** – false accusation; malicious misrepresentation.
[23]**Targum** – translation and paraphrase of parts of the Hebrew Old Testament into Aramaic, the common language spoken in Palestine at the time of Christ.
[24]**want** – lack.
[25]**manifesting** – revealing; making visible.
[26]**extirpate** – totally destroy; pull up by the roots.
[27]**wonderful** – incredible.
[28]**GaiusCaligula** (*Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus*; AD 12-41) – Roman Emperor from AD 37 to 41, the first to proclaim himself as a god.
[29]**impunity** – freedom from punishment.
[30]**gratuitous** – freely bestowed; granted without merit.
[31]**licentious –** unrestrained by law or morality.
[32]**refractory** – stubbornly resistant to authority.
[33]**odium** – disgrace; hatred.
[34]**sagacity** – sound judgment; discernment.
[35] For more on this, see *The Ruler of the Waves* by J.C. Ryle, and the Free Grace Broadcaster #194, *The God of All Comfort*
[36]**Claudius Aelianus** (ca. AD 175 - ca. 235) – Roman author and teacher of rhetoric, Roman-born at Praeneste. His two chief works are valuable for the numerous quotations from the works of earlier authors, which are otherwise lost.
[37]**artifice** – trickery.
[38]**emolument** – gain from position.
[39]**remonstrate** – earnestly oppose or protest against.
[40]**mean** – common; relating to the experience of the average person in everyday life.
[41]**Epicurus** (341?-270 BC) – Greek philosopher and founder of the Epicurean School, which held that the goal of man should be a life of calm pleasure regulated by temperance.
[42]**Aristides** (530-468 BC) – Greek statesman from Athens.
[43]**affect** – pretend.
[44]**periphrasis** – expression using many words where only a few would do.
[45]**type** – symbol of something else with similar characteristics.
[46]**antitype** – that which is symbolized by a type.
[47]**Talmuds** – collection of the oral traditions of the Jewish religious leaders developed and handed down through the centuries, recorded

in writing between AD 100 and 200.
[48]**Abraham Ben Meir Ibn Ezra** (1089-1164) – born at Tudela, Navarre (now part of Spain); one of the most distinguished Jewish men of letters and writers of the Middle Ages. Aben Ezra excelled in philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, poetry, linguistics, and exegesis.
[49]**Origen** (c. AD 185-c. 254) – theologian and biblical scholar of the early Greek Church.
[50]**retributive** – that which is a justly deserved penalty.
[51]**Melito of Sardis** (died c. 180) – bishop of Sardis near Smyrna in western Anatolia; a great authority in early Christianity, who listed one of the early canons of the Bible.
[52]**autographs** – original writings themselves from the pen of the authors.
[53]**divines** – theologically learned men.
[54]**Richard Baxter** (1615-1691) – Puritan preacher and theologian in the Church of England; his ministry at Kidderminster was marked by a dramatic transformation of the whole community. Born in Rowton, Shropshire, England.
[55]**Thomas Carlyle** (1795-1881) – Scottish philosopher, satirical writer, essayist, historian and teacher during the Victorian era. He became a controversial social commentator
[56]**Jeremy Taylor** (1613-1677) – bishop of the Anglican Church, sometimes known as the "Shakespeare of Divines."
[57]**René Descartes** (1596-1650) – French philosopher, mathematician, and writer who spent most of his adult life in the Dutch Republic. He has been dubbed the "Father of Modern Philosophy," and much subsequent Western philosophy is a response to his writings.
[58]**David Hume** (1711-1776) – Scottish philosopher, historian, economist, and essayist known especially for his philosophical empiricism and scepticism. He was one of the most important figures in the history of Western philosophy and the Scottish Enlightenment.
[59]**supineness** – lying on the back with face upward; an expression of laziness.
[60]**tractable** – capable of being easily led, taught, or controlled; docile.
[61]**propitiation** – appeasement; a sin offering that turns away wrath.
[62]**neologians** – those who pride themselves in using new words, or old words in new ways.
[63]**buskins** – short laced boots reaching half-way to the knee.