

ARTICLE III.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER AND THE PALACE OF
AHASUERUS.¹

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AN examination of the arguments and criticisms by the partisans and adversaries of the authenticity of the book of Esther does not come within the limits of this lecture. The exegesis of the book forms part of the work which I devote to the excavations at Susa. I will confine myself now to a few fragments of this general study.

One of the fortunate results of the excavations at Susa is the sudden light which has burst from them, illuminating, with the blaze of a new day, a point hotly disputed

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[This lecture is translated for the sake of the many new and striking facts discovered by the accomplished author in laying bare the ruins of "Shushan the palace," the scene of Esther's history. M. Dieulafoy has pre-eminent right to speak of Susa, for he has been the most able and successful investigator of its antiquities. He shows us that the author of the book of Esther was minutely exact as to the architectural details of this peculiar royal residence; that the history is naturally but minutely conformed to the peculiarities of the palace destroyed 2,300 years ago; that the minutiae of custom and dress are in exact accordance with the newly discovered bas-reliefs, paintings, etc. But M. Dieulafoy holds, that, with this thorough conscientiousness and honesty, the author has indulged in vain boastings, exaggerated numbers, and has worked "a heavy embroidery on an unyielding canvas." For this mental impossibility M. Dieulafoy offers no proof but his opinion. If the writer of the book of Esther was downright honest and exact in the bulk of his narrative, in all fairness he is to be assumed honest and exact in the rest until some positive proof is brought against him.—H. OSGOOD.]

between the rationalistic and orthodox schools, concerning the book of Esther.

Who does not know the touching story of Esther? Ahasuerus at the end of a banquet, where he has taken too much wine, repudiates the queen Vashti. Five years pass. The first cousin of the Jew Mordecai, Hadassah, named Esther after her entrance into the harem, fascinates the king by her modest grace and takes the place of the repudiated wife. Mordecai installs himself in *the king's gate*, discovers a conspiracy plotted against his sovereign, and saves the life of Ahasuerus.

In the meantime, Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite is made grand vizier. Mordecai refuses to prostrate himself before the new minister, bringing upon himself the consequent anger of the favorite, who swears to wash out in the blood of the Hebrew people the insult which a miserable Jew has put upon him. Haman casts the lot "in the first month, which is the month Nisan," and fixes upon the 13th of Adar for the day of the execution.

The couriers have already carried the royal orders to all the satraps, when the new queen, informed by Mordecai of the peril which menaces her co-religionists, enters the *royal house* at the peril of her life.

The brilliant beauty of the suppliant finds grace before Ahasuerus: the king grants the prayers of the favorite, hangs Haman on the gallows prepared for Mordecai, then gives permission to the oppressed to repulse, for two days, the attacks of their enemies.

The Jews make unreserved use of the royal license on the 13th and 14th of the month Adar; and the book closes with the order issued by Esther and Mordecai to celebrate every year the feast of *Purim*, or the "Lots," in commemoration of this triumph.

This is the celebrated theme for the meditations of theologians and of scholars. Celebrated it is for the popularity which it enjoys in the Israelite world, for its secu-

lar character,—the name of God is not mentioned in it,—for the controversies which it has provoked. Melito, Bishop of Sardis in the second century, afterwards, Athanasius and Gregory of Nazianzum, refused to include the book of Esther in the collection of sacred annals; and if it has forced² its entrance into the Christian Bible, it is because, in the history of Ahasuerus and the queen, there is found a symbol of the union of Christ and his church. To-day Christians and Israelites adopt the book of Esther as a whole. The rationalists, though divided on the origin of the feast, consider the whole of the book a work of pure imagination, of later date than the Achæmenian dynasty [i. e., 300 B. C.] and lacking the least connection with history.

What are the criticisms directed against the book of Esther? First and foremost, the name of the feast whose origin it celebrates: *Pur*, from which comes *Purim*, is not a Persian word, argues the rationalistic school, and does not mean "lot," as the Bible pretends, in any language, or in any known dialect. It would be more exact to assert that *Pur* is not found in the very limited lexicon composed from the Achæmenian inscriptions of Behistun, Naksh-i-Rustem, and Persepolis; for the word, considered in itself, is one of the best known and determined of the roots of the Aryan languages. *Pra* in Sanscrit, *Por* in Persian, *Ple* in Latin, *Plein* in French, correspond to the same idea, and give the same meaning to their derivatives. Is this meaning applicable to the name of the feast? Better than any other, to my mind.

I borrow from the Bible itself the translation of the word *Pur*. Before sacrificing the Jews to his vengeance, Haman asks the augurs to fix the day of the massacre. "In the first month, which 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

² [The book of Esther is in the Christian Bible because it has always been in the Hebrew Bible and been received by all Christians except a few.—H. O.]

month, to the twelfth month, which is the month Adar." The sentence presents no difficulty, if one keeps to the literal meaning. It concerns a means of augury called in the Persian tongue *Pur*, which was thrown before any one desirous of taking the advice of fate. The *Pur* undoubtedly expressed its oracles by "yes" or "no." Like the Egyptian gods, it must reply to very decided questions, asked in some kind of double manner. "Shall the Jews be massacred on the first day of the month?" We know that, consulted day by day, month by month, the *Pur* gave a negative answer; then, when the thirteenth day and the twelfth month was called, it answered "Yes," that is, Kill.

Among the objects found in the deep excavation of the Memnonium,¹ is a quadrangular prism, each side measuring a centimetre, and the length four and a half centimetres. On the rectangular faces are engraved different numbers; one, two, five, six. Throw the prism, and it must stand on an even or an uneven number. The Persians love games of chance as much as wine. May not the little Susian relic be one of their dice? and may not their dice, under the name of *Pur*, have been used to consult the fates and try fortunes?

Pur would not have the literal meaning of "lot" any more than cards, urn, or dice, but all these words would belong to similar sentences. "To throw the *Pur*," "to draw the cards," "to put the hand into the urn," "to shake the dice,"—all four convey the same idea: to consult the fates. It is remarkable how happily the Persian expression *Pur* (lit., "full," "solid") is applied to the shape of the dice of the Achæmenians. Does not a parallelepiped, a square prism, realize the most perfect of the shapes which we, French and Persians, call "solids"? This being the case, I would modify in the following way the translation of the two passages in which the *Pur* is mentioned: "In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year

¹[That is, the palace at Susa, Shushan.]

of the king Ahasuerus, they cast the die [lit. "the solid"], that is the lot [an explanation necessary for the Jews, who were ignorant of the language and customs of Persia], before Haman. . . . And the Jews undertook to do as they had begun, and as Mordecai had written unto them; because Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had devised against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast the die, that is, the lot. . . . and they hung Haman and his sons on the gallows. Wherefore they called these days *Purim*, after the name of *Pur*."

This new interpretation would have the triple advantage of satisfying grammar, history, and good sense; for it is inadmissible that a Persian Jew who wrote at Susa under the last Achæmenians, as I shall show later, should have used an unintelligible Persian word, accepted, however, by his Persian co-religionists.

There remains to be explained the delay of nearly a year which intervenes between the month of Nisan, when the condemnation of the Jews was published, and the 13th of Adar, the day fixed for their massacre; also the enormous spoils which Haman promised himself after the annihilation of his enemies, the permission given to the Hebrews to fall upon the Persians, and the terrible vengeance taken by the Jews upon their oppressors. German exegesis confesses that it does not understand Haman's purpose when he sent out the orders of execution eleven months in advance, and attributes this premature warning to the imagination of the romancer. I ask, on the other side, what interest the author could have in giving superfluous details, if they were not historic. I may perhaps be deceived, but never did a problem seem easier to solve. Haman consulted the *Pur*; the die speaks and fixes upon the 13th of Adar for the execution of the Jews. A favorable occasion offers itself, the favorite seizes it, gains the king's assent, hastens to seal the firmans, and despatches them to the satraps, for orders sealed and published become irrevocable. Princes are forgetful and whimsical,

and Haman must have experienced this many a time. It is, however, of no importance to the prime minister whether the Jews are warned of their fate several days or several months beforehand. The end is attained, the vengeance will come in its own time; the victims of the favorite can hope for no human aid.

The dogma of infallibility is the fatal consequence of the sovereign and almost divine power belonging to the true autocrat. Whoever retracts has been mistaken. The history of Persia proves that the Shahinshahs' never knew this weakness. Take two examples from a thousand; they have the merit of being recent.

Fat-Ali-Shah reached Shiraz at the head of a part of his army. The royal caravan, surprised in a deep gorge by a snow-storm, was soon in need of provisions. The generals informed the Shah of the condition of his troops and entreated him to order the breaking up of camp. He refused, argued the perils of the route, and put off the start until the day when the snow should have disappeared from a neighboring peak. Famine ravaged the escort, already decimated by cold. Commanders and soldiers might die to the last one, still the sovereign would not modify his first orders. The courtiers were so convinced of this that, instead of importuning their master with useless complaints, they sent the healthy men to the mountain, cleared away in one night the rock which the king had designated, and, when the morning came, claimed from the stupified Fat-Ali-Shah the order to depart. The snow was still heavy, the roads still dangerous, but the king could yield without committing an offence against his infallibility.

Aga Mohammed, the predecessor of Fat-Ali-Shah, died a victim to the same dogma. The founder of the Kadjar dynasty regulated every Friday morning the service of the officers who surrounded him. The Persian army was encamped near Erivan, when a quarrel arose be-

⁴ [I. e., King of kings, title of the Persian monarchs.]

tween two servants sitting near the royal tent. They were ordered to be silent; the dispute grew hotter. "Let them be killed instantly," ordered the Shah. "It is Friday," observed the courtiers; and the beheading was put off till the morrow. The routine of the guard called the two condemned men to watch the monarch during the night between Friday and Saturday. The order was declared irrevocable. It was obeyed, but toward midnight the two servants profited by the sleep of Aga Mohammed, assassinated their master and fled.

Masudy tells the following legend: King Hirati, in a night of orgie, had caused two of his faithful courtiers to be killed. He raised a magnificent mausoleum to them and commanded all his subjects to salute when passing the tomb of his friends. If one failed to bow profoundly, the punishment was to be hung high and quickly, but before going to the scaffold one had the right to express two wishes, which were granted immediately. A fuller passed by the monument and refused to bow. He was brought before Hirati. "Why have you disobeyed my orders?" "I saluted." "The guards testify the contrary. You know the law: you shall die. What do you wish?" "To give you a blow on the head with a mallet." The king cried out, called his councillors together, consulted the theologians. Laymen and clergy were of the opinion that the sovereign should obey the law, for the orders had been sealed, promulgated, and had become irrevocable. Hirati sat down upon the throne; the fuller approached, and struck a violent blow with the mallet on the head of the monarch. For six months the king hung between life and death. As soon as he recovered, he called the fuller: "You have a second request to make. Speak." "After having struck you on the right temple, I wish to renew the experience with the left temple." "Why do you persist in this useless folly! Do you wish the half of my treasure? Do you desire me to give my only daughter to your son, to marry your widow?"

You shall be satisfied." "I want only one thing, to strike you a second blow with the mallet." Memory happily returned to the king: "Did you not pretend that you did salute the tomb?" "I persist in affirming it." "You certainly speak the truth. The guardian of the tomb is an imposter, who should be treated according to his deserts. Take ten of my guard, overpower your accuser, and above all do not fail to kill him. I give you the reversion of his office."

In the same way we see Mordecai, when he has taken Haman's place, using a subterfuge to save the Jews from death, because he could not obtain a counter-order nor even a delay of the punishment, and this because the firman had been sealed with the royal seal and sent out. "Then were the king's scribes called at that time in the third month, which is the month Sivan, and . . . Mordecai wrote in the name of king Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by couriers on horseback, riding on swift steeds that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud: wherein the king granted the Jews who were in every city to gather themselves together, and to stand for their life, to destroy, to slay, and to cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that would assault them."

The Bible seems to say that the execution of the Hebrews was proclaimed like a popular fête, a Saint Bartholomew fomented by Ahura Mazda against Jehovah. But the Jews, warned of the favorable disposition of the court, came together, organized resistance, and, thanks to the support given them by the courtiers of the new star which was rising in the harem of Susa, victoriously opposed their enemies. Thus is destroyed the double objection made to the long interval which separates the condemnation of the Jews to execution and the vengeance wreaked upon the Persians by the co-religionists of Mordecai. The two facts are the historic consequences of the same common law. A slave of the divine will expressed by the

Pur, Haman finds himself obliged to put off the massacre of the Hebrews for eleven months, but he hastens nevertheless to have the royal decree sealed and sent forth, in order to make this massacre irrevocable. Ahasuerus, on his side, bound by his former decision, can only save the Jews by lending them hidden aid against his Persian subjects. As to the numbers, perhaps falsely transcribed, they neither represent the duration of the feast, nor the number of victims, nor the measure of the spoil; they express the poetic exaggeration and joy of the victors. They must be excused, without drawing from them either positive or negative arguments.

Some exegetes are surprised to find no mention of the story of Esther by the Greek authors. I have explained how the centuries and expedients had distorted the simplest facts, modified outlines, exaggerated the proportions of persons. From the standpoint of the sacred analyst, the universe disappears, the whole scene is occupied by people who, from simple supernumeraries are raised to a rank of the first importance. Of what interest to the Greeks were these trifling intrigues of the harem? And is it at all certain that the Greek collections of anecdotes, of which the larger part has been lost, did not recount the adventures of Esther?

Thus far the rationalists have walked together. It was only a question of destroying; characters and scenery were sacrificed without pity. Well; but when one is confronted with an historic work or an apocryphal tradition of which the celebrated and ancient feast of *Purim* is the pivot, its connection must be discovered at any price. At this point the assailants divide. Some of them claim that the word written in Hebrew *Pur*, as well as the Greek Septuagint translation *Phourai*, has no reasonable meaning in either Persian or Hebrew. I have given my opinion in regard to this. But it appears that, in a different edition of the Greek text, a copyist, more or less faithful, has written *Phourdia*, instead of *Pur*; and they re-

remembered that under the name of *Fourdi* the ancient Persians celebrated the return of spring, bringing in the new year in a perfumed chariot. Such were the Lupercalia holidays in Italy at the same season. From this remark to the affirmation that the feast of *Purim* was a misunderstood souvenir of the days of *Fourdi*, there was only one step, and it was quickly taken.

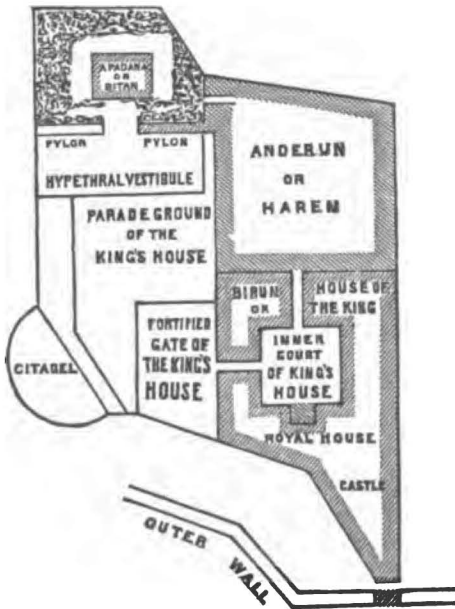
Should I be mistaken in the literal and figurative meaning of *Pur*, I still share the opinion of Reuss, who considers this explanation ingenious, but insufficient. It is dangerous to settle the etymology of a word upon doubtful translations in a foreign language, especially when one can have recourse to a Hebrew version of much earlier date than the Greek paraphrases. Are we to understand that a feast whose religious character is affirmed by a preparatory fast, that a triumphal feast and one whose origin was sanguinary, was grafted upon the joyous revels of *Fourdi*? Finally, has it been proved that the Persian feast is more ancient than the book of Esther? All of these questions are left unanswered. Numbers of scholars rest to-day upon another solution. It is said, in the first book of the Maccabees (vii. 43, 49) that Judah gained a decisive victory over Nicanor on the 13th of Adar (160 B. C.), that is, on the day of the fast preparatory to the feast of *Purim*, and commanded the anniversary of this glorious feat of arms to be celebrated from that time forth. This coincidence in dates seems so conclusive that it has been proposed to trace the origin of the feast of *Purim* to the victory of the Jews over the Syrians. The book of Esther, a romance of triumph written in this feverish epoch of Jewish history, would have been the more quickly substituted for real history because this rested upon facts, that upon sentiments. Surely, it is charming to settle a knotty discussion by a whim; but a paradox, however ingenious, was never equal to a good reason. Moreover objections abound. The promoters of this new theory do not even try to justify the name of the feast, and think they have

solved the difficulty by affecting to disregard it. The enigma will always bar the road to commentators who have not solved it. Still more: Josephus, for example, testifies that the day of Mordecai has been celebrated in its present forms since the first century before our era. On the other side, we know that, from time immemorial, there was no question about the feasts of Judah either in the calendars or in religious practice. How can it be explained that sixty or seventy years sufficed for a tale to efface the remembrance of a memorable victory? With as great success might the attempt be made to prove that the feasts of the Catholic Church are a modern invention. Easter might have been imagined the day of the taking of Jerusalem by the Crusaders. The victory of Christ over death, the songs of joy, would be transparent allusions to the success of the Christians over the Mussulmans, to the resurrection of faith in a country where it had succumbed, and to the chants intoned by the Crusaders on entering the City of God. Pentecost would recall the taking of Ronda, that last stronghold of the infidels, which fell into the hands of the Spaniards on Whitsunday, and the tongues of fire, the red bullets used for the first time in this celebrated siege. The new theory raises other difficulties. It is contradicted by the excavations at Susa, as I shall show later, and by the witness of the second book of the Maccabees. Judah, we read in chap. xv. ver. 36, vanquished the Syrians on the eve of the feast of *Purim*.^{*} The day of Mordecai, then, was celebrated earlier than the defeat of Nicanor? "It makes no difference," reply the scholars from beyond the Rhine, "the author of the second book of the Maccabees is a poor teller of legends, unworthy of credence." Legends, it may be, but legends accepted by the sons of heroes who had fought under the command of Judah and Simon. What ingenuity and what effort to destroy a tradition which is, after all, inoffensive!

I have so far applied myself to the refutation of the great

^{*}[Lit., "The day of Mordecai" in the Septuagint.—H. O.]

objections, and to showing the false method German exegetes have followed in using their scalpel in this oriental world, which they dissect from too great a distance or examine from too great a height. Henceforth I shall spend no more time on banquets of wine, the condition of queens, the feast of *Purim*, royal infallibility, on documents not ap-



Ground-plan of the palace of Ahasuerus at Susa.

preciated, but of great value for the familiar history of the courts of the Achæmenians; I shall not return to the chronology of the book, I shall only apply myself to descriptions, and shall content myself with following the characters of the drama through the Memnonium, and pointing out the ease with which they move about this peculiarly arranged palace, brought up from among the dead after

having been buried for twenty-four centuries.

One follows with the liveliest interest a real or fictitious tale, one appreciates most highly the events and the developments of a drama, when the scene of the action is best known. I shall therefore describe, before making any comments, the Achæmenian acropolis of Susa. The Memnonium had no resemblance to the royal dwellings discovered at Koyoundjik, Nimroud, or Khorsabad. It was composed of three groups of distinct apartments, each surrounded by a special enclosure, but included within the same fortress. The *apadâna*, or throne room, resembled, in its arrangement and by its hypostyle architecture, a Grecian temple. The king occupied in the tabernacle the place of the divine statue. The hall at Susa covers nearly a hectare [between two and three acres]; the porticos, the stairways, the enclosures, were spread out upon a terrace, the area of which was eighteen times as large, and was divided in two parts by a pylon. On one side, a gigantic stairway led to the outside parade on a level with a wide esplanade; on the other side, sparkling in its crown of emeralds, overshadowed by the foliage of a hanging garden, was the *apadâna*, where were received the ambassadors of all the states of Greece. The private apartments of the sovereign were distant from the *apadâna*, and grouped around an interior court, with the hall of audience, bed-rooms, apartments appropriated to the chancellor's office, to the military house, to the guard, to dependents. In modern Persian, this part of the palace is called the *birun* (exterior), in contrast to the *anderun* (interior harem) reserved for the women.

The *anderun* comprises the apartments of the queens and quite a large number of cells for the concubines of second rank and for the postulants for the royal favors. The master of this department is not so much the king as the grand eunuch. The *anderun* of Susa, walled, padlocked, and more tightly closed—I speak only from a constructive point of view—than even the most rigorous prison, is

protected by the buildings of the birun and the apadâna. The last two, recognizable in the accompanying plan by their separation and by the tower (keep) connected with the private dwelling of the king, occupy the two branches of a gigantic L whose transept was reserved for the women's apartments.

Leaving the anderun by the west door, one would step directly into the gardens of the apadâna; walking towards the south, one would cross the birun. The palace had numerous entrances: I will mention the fortified gate of the king's house and the gate of the general enclosure, which opened to the south of the tower and was the means of communication between the acropolis and the city of Susa. I will confine myself to this topographical *ensemble*; it is enough for the understanding of the text. I should add that these different apartments are also found at Persepolis, but without direct communication with one another, and in a very different grouping. The apadâna answers to the great hall of Xerxes, or the hall of the hundred columns; the birun, or king's private house, to the little palace of Darius and of Artaxerxes, called in ancient Persian by the peculiar name of *vithia*; the audience-room of the birun to the central apartment of these last buildings. The anderun, standing out on the extreme north of the platform, extended along the mountain.

In the opening of the book of Esther, the garden of the *bitan*⁶ is mentioned in connection with the great feast. Neither philologist nor exegete has troubled himself about the word *bitan*, though it is very important.

Bitan appears here for the first time, and is not used a second time except on the occasion of the banquet given by Esther to the king and the grand vizier. The sovereign, being overcome with wine, goes out for a moment to breathe the air in the shade of the gardens of the bitan,

⁶ [*Bitan* occurs three times in the book of Esther, and is translated in the Authorized and Revised Version, "palace." Esth. i. 5., "in the court of the *bitan* of the King;" vii. 7, 8, "the garden of the *bitan*" (twice).—H. O.]

and returns to the *anderun*. In the other portions of the story, the rooms traversed or frequented are designated, without fear of repetition or monotony, under the one name of *bêth* (house), followed by appropriate adjectives: the king's house, the house of the women, the royal house, Haman's house. *Bitan* is an architectural term corresponding to a very peculiar building, and used by the narrator in a special sense and in certain cases.

When one has studied the spirit of the Memnonium for two years it is impossible not to recognize in the *bitan* of the Bible the *apadâna* of Susa.

Of all the buildings of the palace, only the tabernacle consecrated to the deified king must and did rise in the midst of a paradise; it alone was somewhat isolated from the apartments reserved for the residence of the sovereign, so that, without inconvenience, a large number of men could be introduced into it. Like the *bitan*, the *apadâna* was surrounded by groves in immediate connection with the house of the women; like the *bitan*, it was preceded by an immense vestibule, capable of holding the guests of Ahasuerus; like the *bitan*, it was hypostyle, an essential fact to notice, and paved with colored marbles. Lastly, like the *bitan*, it played an important part in the life of the kings of Persia and the ceremonial of the court of the Achæmenians. These are analogies too strange to be fortuitous, analogies so peculiar that the Persian palaces of Persepolis, of Parsagada, or of Firuz-Abâd, of Hatra, of Ctesiphon and of Eivan-Kerkha, which were built under the Achæmenians, the Parthians, or the Sasanians, do not correspond as a whole to the description of the *bitan* of Ahasuerus.

As Esther increased in glory and in power, "Mordecai sat in the king's gate. Two of the king's chamberlains, Bigthan and Teresh, of those who kept the door, were wroth and sought to lay hands on the king Ahasuerus." Mordecai, informed of the conspiracy, warned the queen, Esther, who denounced the eunuchs in the name of her

uncle. Bigthan and Teresh were immediately tried, found guilty and hung. The account of the plot was recorded in the royal chronicles. A great number of exegetes have thought they recognized in the Hebrew word *shaar* (literally, "the gate of an enclosure," opposed to *petach*, "door of a room") the idea of a palace, and have translated the first phrase of the verse mentioned above: "Mordecai installed himself in the palace of the king." I prefer to keep to the literal meaning, consistent with the manners of Persia and the general tenor of the work. By what right would a Jew, and an unknown Jew (for Mordecai hid the relationship of the queen), be introduced into and installed in the dwelling of the sovereign? This interpretation is without merit, because it is improbable and hinders the course of the story. Are not the conspirators called "guardians of the threshold"? The sequel of the story, moreover, confirms my way of looking at it. When Mordecai finds admittance to the king's *shaar* refused to him, where does he pass the day? In the "broad place of the city" which is in front of the entrance to the fortress, and "he came even before the king's *shaar*, for none might enter within the king's *shaar* clothed with sackcloth;" which means that, not being able to sit in the king's *shaar*, that is under the grand gate of the enclosure, he approached as near to this most favorable place as his mourning garments would permit. There can be no reference to the interior of the palace in the latter part of this sentence—all commentators agree upon this,—but, then, why change the meaning of *shaar* in passing from one verse to another? Why translate the same word, there by "palace," here by "great gate"? This error of the translators comes from a false interpretation of oriental customs. In the language of modern diplomacy, the word *Porte*, long since diverted from its real meaning, signifies the administrative abode of the Sultan; but is very different with the Persians and the Arabs, because, with these people, the great gate of a palace or of a city has

lost none of its ancient importance. From the remote days when the angels entering Sodom met Lot there, the gate has indicated its superior position by its height, its massiveness, and the richness of its architecture. Placed where it will catch the best currents of air, pierced by deep niches, furnished with benches set in the thickness of the wall, it is the favorite meeting-place of the loungers from within and without. The master himself likes its grateful coolness, and enjoys spreading the carpet of justice under the shady arches of this improvised prætorium.

No observatory more convenient than the entrance to the palace could be found from which Mordecai could watch his niece across the massive buildings of the harem, and continue his wise counsels to her, while yet remaining unknown. Can the situation of the shaar of the king be determined? The facts are so clearly stated, the architectural terms are so appropriate to the description of the edifice, that the reply does not seem at all doubtful to me. By these words—the king's gate—we can only understand the outer gate of the Memnonium, which opened at the foot of the tower in the citadel built in the southwest angle of the general enclosure. The last lines of the verse speak of the celebrated annals which Ctesius saw, and from which Nicholas of Damascus took, undoubtedly at second hand, the curious episodes of the battle of Parsagada, when Cyrus met the army of Astyages.

In the third chapter we find the episode of Haman. The scene is laid again in the great gate of the king. Mordecai refuses to bow down in public before the new favorite. The all-powerful minister cannot swallow this affront and tries to obtain from the king, by means of a considerable sum, a *pichkach* as it is called in Persian, the edict of extermination, which would avenge him upon Mordecai and the Jews of the empire,—a dangerous step, that only blind anger could have counselled, for, in making the unwise display of a suddenly acquired fortune,

Haman signed his own death-warrant. Long before the time of Louis XIV., it was imprudent to give "*fêtes de Vaux*" for the king.

The Persian tongue calls by a special name—*pichkach*—these gifts of self-interest by officials to powerful people, because it is perhaps at the court of the Shahinshahs that this custom had its birth and has perpetuated itself so well. The *bakshish* and the *anam* are drink-money or alms solicited; the *souqat* and the *atd*, presents exchanged between equals; the *khalat*, a robe of honor offered by the king to governors or to favorites whom he wishes to honor; the *pichkach*, on the contrary, is a voluntary contribution of an inferior anxious to gain the good graces of his chief. Haman's proposition proves that, if Persia has learned little, she has forgotten nothing. Ahasuerus does not accept his minister's offers, but permits him to seal the firman of the execution with the royal seal.

Informed of the fatal news by Mordecai's care, Esther resolves, even at the peril of her life, to ask pardon for her co-religionists, and leaves the harem, after having fasted and prayed for three days. "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 entrance of the house. "And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight: and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near and touched the top of the sceptre." Never was the plan of an edifice described with greater clearness. The queen passed through the door of the harem, anderun, entered the inner court of the *king's house* and found before her the *royal house*, at whose further end Ahasuerus sat enthroned. An unusual noise attracts the attention of the monarch; he looks, and, through the ever open door of the oriental palace, sees the favorite, pale, breathless, waiting for the word of

life or death which shall fall from his lips. From all this I conclude : 1st. That the *king's house* extended around a large interior court ; 2d. That on one of its sides it bordered upon the harem, *anderun* ; 3d. That the *royal house*, which one must be careful not to confound with the *king's house*, occupied one of the sides of the interior court of the king's house ; 4th. That the royal house rose opposite the door which formed the communication between the royal house and the house of the women, *anderun*. On the other side, I conclude from a preceding verse (chap. i. 9) that the royal house was the largest room of the private apartments, since Queen Vashti received there the women of Susa, while the men's feast was served under awnings hung in the porches of the *bitan*.

To return to the plan of the Susian acropolis. It will be remembered that the private dwelling of the Achæmenian sovereigns (that part of the palace which the Persians call the *birun*, the Bible, the *king's house*, and the inscriptions of Persepolis, the *vithia*) occupied in the Memnonium the southern part of the rectangular platform. It consists of a central court bounded on the west by the fortifications of the exterior gate of the king's house ; on the north by apartments bordering on the walk which separated it from the harem ; on the east by other apartments forming part, as did those on the north, of the king's house ; on the south, that is, opposite the entrance of the harem, by a large room, well situated, shown clearly in the plan. It is the hall called in the Bible the *royal house*, where the king gave his daily audiences. The royal house was as distinct from the *bitan* or *apadâna*, devoted to the great sessions of the crown, as the gigantic rooms of Persepolis may have been from the hypostyle halls in the small palaces of Darius or of his successors.

It is always dangerous to attempt to find terms of comparison between Europe and Persia, between the nineteenth century and antiquity. Under cover of this reservation, I may liken the *king's house* to the privat

apartments, the *royal house* to the study, and the *bitan* and *apadâna* to the throne room of the modern sovereign. The chronicler is so exact, he is so imbued with his double character of annalist and of guide, that one cannot go astray in his company. He is exact even to the point of delighting in the topographical peculiarities that are foreign to his story. The author of the book of Esther knew the palace of Susa as well as he knew the ceremonial of the Achæmenian court, and made use of all the incidents to display his knowledge. When he tells of the queen's approach to Ahasuerus, he specifies that Esther came into the court of the *king's house*, which is the *inner court*, in order to prove that his memory brings before him the relative positions of the harem and the king's house and the communications between them. When he shows us Haman walking at dawn before his master's house, he arrests his steps before the private entrance of the *king's house*. The favored minister lives in the city; he has passed, thanks to his high position, through the gate of the general enclosure, the king's shaar, but can penetrate no farther, unless the sovereign sends him word. The chronicler sums up the situation by one adjective, "and Haman came into the *outer court* of the king's house." This *outer court* of the king's house is none other than the parade ground of the Acropolis of Susa, contained within the fortified gate of the birun, the walls of the citadel, and the stairway of the apadâna. In the palace of Ahasuerus it is in direct communication with the large gate of the general enclosure, or shaar of the king. Let it be noticed that there is never any question of the bitan or apadâna, separated from the dwelling of the Susian monarchs by the immense quarter reserved for the women, though the annalist passes through the king's house. But if one enter Esther's apartment, immediately is felt the proximity of the bitan and the gardens whose extreme limits shaded the western buildings of the harem.

“ And the king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine ” (given by Esther in her own house to the king and the grand vizier) “ and went into the garden of the bitan.” “ Then the king returned out of the garden of the bitan into the hall of the banquet of wine.” A last glance at the Memnonium enables us to follow Ahasuerus across the gardens of the bitan and to prove undeniably that on leaving the queen’s house, the monarch entered directly the paradise of the apadâna.

The superposition of the plans drawn, first, from the attentive reading of the book of Esther, from the routes pursued by the favorite Haman and by the king; second, from the study of the ruins, could not be more perfect. With the Bible in hand, try to rebuild the great divisions of the palace of Ahasuerus, and you will be led to construct a building having the most complete analogy to the acropolis of Artaxerxes Memnon. The bitan, its gardens and its open vestibule, would occupy at a great distance from the *king’s house*, the square of the apadâna and of the platform which precedes it; the anderun, harem, would join on one side the gardens of the bitan, on the other the *king’s house*; the *inner court of the king’s house* would be bounded by the *royal house* on that side which faced the door communicating between the anderun and the birun; the *outer court of the king’s house* would correspond to the parade ground, and the *king’s gate* to the only gate of the general enclosure.

The excavations at Susa not only confirm the architectural descriptions of the book of Esther, but even the smallest details of the story. When Esther presents herself in the inner court of the king’s house, Ahasuerus is sitting upon his throne; as a sign of pardon, he holds out to the favorite the golden sceptre which is in his hand. An analogous scene is illustrated on the walls of the palaces at Persepolis. There too, the king, sitting upon his raised throne, holds a long cane—the sceptre—the symbol of his sovereign power, inherited in later years by the great digni-

taries of the Shiite clergy. In a country where small and great squat upon carpets, the throne and the sceptre were perhaps the only sumptuary privileges of royalty. The robes, the dressing of the head, the jewels, the arms, seem common to the king and his chief subjects. The "Immortals" themselves wore the crown and the Median robe. Herodotus told us of this; Susa has confirmed it. So the description of Mordecai's triumph seems to me to be as probable as it was carefully observed. The king of Persia bestowed the recompenses described in the latter verses of the sixth chapter. "For the man whom the king delighteth to honor, let *royal apparel* be brought *which the king useth to wear*, and the horse that the king rideth upon, and the royal crown which is set upon his head, and let the apparel and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that with them they may array the man whom the king delighteth to honor." "To the men whom the kings of Persia wish to honor they offer a Median robe, that is the court robe," the Greek historians tell us. "*Khalatrâ pushid*, they say at the court of Nasr-eddin-Shah, when such a thing occurs, literally: He has put on the *khalat*," that is the cashmere robe which has been worn by the Shah, and given as the highest reward to the most faithful servants. Such is the case with Mordecai: *khalutra nipushid*, he puts on the *khalat*, but does not by that dress as a king, for neither the robe, nor the horse, nor the crown, is the exclusive mark of the monarch. These minute details of form give the correct estimate of the criticisms of the book of Esther by the philologists who are strangers to customs which take us back to the heart of Persia twenty-four centuries ago. As well might one look at a landscape through a dark camera and pretend, after this experience, that men have their feet up and their heads down, as to study the customs of the East by consulting the dictionary. By this method the greatest minds would be misled, because, without intending it, they measure by

the same standard Europe and Asia, the past and the present. Though the Great King was perhaps the only man in his immense empire to sit up and to carry a long cane, none of our modern exegetes dream of being astonished at it. The most ignorant students as well as the most learned professors use the same seats as the sovereign, and have they not the same right to lean upon a long stick? Mordecai also may array himself, without any shocking improbability, in the king's robe, for the military cloak of a German emperor does not differ from that of his generals. But the crown! The dilemma assumes proportions immediately: either the author of the book of Esther was the ignorant narrator of the apocryphal story or it was Mordecai's horse that wore the crown upon his head! And there is no torture to which syntax has not been submitted in order to make it privy to this compromise. The moral of these facts may be deduced in two lines: in order to appreciate the relative density of bodies, they must always be placed in the same medium; the agate which falls to the bottom of the water floats in mercury.

I cannot end the description of the royal costume without speaking of the Median robe, white and purple (*kek hileth*), which the Bible gives to the Achæmenian sovereigns. This garment, exhumed in the Memnonium, is borne by the guards of Darius. The white robe striped with purple is well known to ancient writers, who compare it to the consular toga.

Reference is often made to the despatches written by the chancellor's office "unto every province according to the writing thereof, and unto every people after their language.....and sent by couriers on horseback, riding on swift steeds, that were used in the king's service, bred of the stud." These indications are rigorously exact. The official decrees of the Achæmenians were drawn up in three languages. The postal organization on all the military routes of the empire dated from the time of Da-

rius. Herodotus has even preserved the Persian name of the couriers for us, *angaroi*, and that of the race of the horses. The "*Nisean*" horses were raised for the service of the head of the State in the valleys of Media.

I shall not carry these comments any further. The last chapter of the book of Esther contains songs of triumph stamped with excessive but very natural exaggeration. Arithmetical precision and impartiality are not the ordinary qualities of an oriental writer, still less of an Oriental interested in a cause, intoxicated with pride, elated by the unlooked-for triumph of his co-religionists. The biblical annalist must be pardoned his innocent boastings and his final vauntings, in consideration of his efforts to be truthful in the narrative portions of his work. I claim the same indulgence in favor of his heroine. The exegetes who treat the characters of the drama as apocryphal, accuse the favorite of a crime in having prepared for the vengeance of the Jewish people; like Lady Macbeth, Esther will never wash away the blood which, on two occasions, gushed out upon her hands. Will the centuries never moderate the partiality of human judgment? Are there causes which can never be carried before a just tribunal? The queen is not the ferocious demon which the too sensitive Germans depict to us. Far from that. A miracle of beauty, pure in her morals, faithful to her unhappy brethren, courageous even to martyrdom, terrible to the enemies of her race, the favorite of Ahasuerus sums up in herself all the great virtues of the woman of antiquity. Forgetfulness of injuries, magnanimity in triumph, are anachronisms for Bible times;¹ as to sentimental pranks, I warrant they were never in favor at the court of Susa.

I think I have shown, in spite of the opinion of several philologists, that the book of Esther describes the court of the Great King. The *Pur*, the *anderun*, the *khalat*, in-

¹ [God gave the same precepts in the Old Testament (Lev. xix. 18 : Prov. xxv. 21, 22 ; Job xxxi. 29, 30) as in the New (Matt. v. 43 ; xxii. 39, etc., Rom. xii. 20). The following of these precepts is quite as rare proportionately to-day as in ancient times.—H. O.]

fallibility, the Median costume, are not the marks of a common centre of oriental civilizations, but of Iran. The palace of Ahasuerus is enough to characterize an epoch, a people, a city. Unhappily the conviction is not compulsory; only the mathematical sciences have the divine privilege of leaving the mind entirely satisfied, because they lead to the discovery of absolute truths. In the realm of relative verities, however, one does reach results which it is difficult to deny. Thus the nationality of the chronicler and his special characteristics can hardly be contested: the author of the book of Esther is a Jew of Susa who saw and who visited the palace of Artaxerxes Memnon and who delighted in exact descriptions.

Herodotus, Plutarch, Masudy, the history of Persia, the bas-reliefs of Persepolis, and, more than all, the palaces of Susa, witness to the thorough honesty of the author and to his observant disposition. This Jew, so profoundly Jewish, forgets his nationality in order to make us better acquainted with the heart of the Susian palace, to describe strange customs and the complicated intrigues of the harem. He forgets even his mother-tongue. M. Oppert has shown this in a scholarly manner by criticising in the book of Esther, not only all the proper names, but also a large number of words and expressions essentially Persian. In historic matter, the chronicler seems to me to be no less truthful. Charming traits of manners, fine observations, dramatic incidents, are recorded without artifice or malice, free from care lest the recital should take away the moral. Thus are recounted the disgrace of Vashti, the accession of Esther, the intervention of Mordecai, Esther's petition, the banquet made for the king, the fall of Haman. Haman is not condemned for having conceived the unjust design of massacring the people of Israel, but because Ahasuerus, moved by the tears of a beautiful queen, intoxicated by the excellent wine which she had had served to him, mistook the intentions of his minister and accused him, very wrongly, of doing violence to Esther. Perhaps, even the guilty one might have

escaped the gallows, if the eunuch Harbonah, but lately prostrate at the feet of the all-powerful favorite, had not hastened the fall of the tottering colossus. In his position as lackey he insinuated to the monarch this perfidious but human advice: "Behold, also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman hath made for Mordecai, who spake good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman." And the king naturally allows himself to be tempted by the prospect of hanging his minister upon a lofty gallows. So perished Haman, a great culprit in the eyes of eternal justice, but innocent of the crime which decided Ahasuerus to punish him.

A romancer, and especially the author of a special plea, would not have failed to attribute the fall and execution of Haman to the influence of his heroine alone, or to the persecution directed against the Jews; the death of the guilty one should be the direct punishment and the evident consequence of the crime. Truth does not always march in line with logic, and the chronicler has so little idea of correcting history in behalf of an argument, that he leaves to fate and to the cunning of a vile eunuch the care of unraveling the tragedy. The hand of Jehovah, the supreme protector of the Hebrew people, does not even appear in this scene of striking realism.

The epoch in which the Hebrew version of the book of Esther was written may be fixed in the fourth century B. C. I maintain this date by tangible considerations, of a nature, I hope, to convince even prejudiced minds. The palace of Artaxerxes Memnon was pillaged by Alexander. The Achæmenian citadel of Susa was again spoken of in the account of the campaign of Eumenes; then silence fell upon the sovereign acropolis, whose possession, in the words of Aristagoras, gave a power equal to that of Jupiter. The palace fell into ruin; I have discovered, still open in its side, the wound of which it died. The ground was levelled, the Parthians buried the palaces of the Achæmenians as the Achæmenians had buried the palaces of their ancestors, and the work of destruction

was so complete in the time of the first Arsacides that, in the second century B. C., the inhabitants of Susa dug their tombs in the rubbish of the fortress. The funeral urns hidden by thousands in these places of burial are of the Parthian era, as is proved by the great number of pieces, until now very rare, belonging to Commascir, a local king, contemporary with Ptolemy VI., Philometor, (B. C. 181-146), and Demetrius Soter (163-151). The final ruin of the palace at Susa, long before the age of Commascir, later than the contests of Eumenes, should correspond to the establishment of the Parthian kingdom and to the revolutions which preceded the overthrow of the Seleucides. I would therefore place the final abandonment of the Memnonium several years before its fall, towards the end of the third century B. C. This date seems to me indisputable. As it is equally certain that the palace was described from nature, while still standing and inhabited, the time of the writing of the book of Esther must be put back at least to the first year of the fourth century B. C.

Thus, as I promised to demonstrate, with proofs of mathematical certainty, the hypothesis which would make the book of Esther into a romance with a purpose, posterior to the successes of the Maccabees (160 B. C.), is in all respects inadmissible and falls by itself. The school of which Mr. Reuss is the spokesman rejects with reason the assimilation of the feast of *Purim* with an ill-defined feast, little known, celebrated by the Persians on the return of spring. What remains of the solutions so laboriously conceived by the rationalists beyond the Rhine? The biblical legend, old, perfumed with the odors of Susa, alive in its simplicity. I have said "legend," and I adhere to this word, for I do not defend either the figures or the general tone of the recital.

This great exaggeration of an unimportant revolution in the harem is due, I have already observed, to the nature of the subject, to the character of the oriental writers, to the very excusable excitement of the chroniclers, and more than all to the years which separate the ages.

sion of Esther from the most ancient edition, among those which have come down to us, of her probable adventures.

Let me explain myself. The excavations at Susa, confirmed by the trilingual inscription engraved around the columns of the apadâna, teach us that the Achæmenian sovereigns twice established themselves upon the banks of the Ulaeus. Darius built over the ruined dwellings of the Elamite kings the first palace; this building, burned during the reign of Xerxes, was rebuilt by the care of Artaxerxes Memnon.

I cannot state positively that the new apadâna, which, under the name of *bitan*, plays such an important part in the history of Esther, was reconstructed on the ruins of the hall that had been destroyed by fire; from certain indications I should even think the contrary. On the other hand, no one any longer disputes the identity of the two forms of Xerxes and Ahasuerus. In this case Mordecai and his cousin would be the contemporaries of Xerxes, while the book of Esther would have been compiled in the reign of Artaxerxes Memnon or of his successors, since the architectural descriptions refer to the second palace built at Susa by the Achæmenians. The Bible does not contradict this conclusion. The sacred chronicler, whose good faith cannot be too much praised, allows it to be understood in the beginning of his narrative, that he is telling of an event already long past: "In the days of Ahasuerus, (this is Ahasuerus who reigned over an hundred and seven and twenty provinces)."

To sum up: the book of Esther, written honestly at Susa by a Susian Jew, goes back for its Hebrew compilation, to this side of the accession of Artaxerxes Memnon and far beyond the Parthian conquest. I pretend to prove no more. The very clear designation of the feast by a known and appropriate Persian word, the manifest sincerity of the author, the probability of the facts related, the chronology, the flavor of the tale, the realism of the end, make me think after all, that the legend of *Purim* is a somewhat heavy embroidery worked upon an unyielding canvas.