
ESTHER 1: 1 Now in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, over one hundred twenty-seven provinces),

The son and successor of the famous Persian king Xerxes was Artaxerxes, surnamed Longimanus, or, in Persian, Ardsheer Diraz dest, the long-handed Ardshur. This prince, on coming to the throne, had powerful opponents and competitors in the children of Artabanus, uncle to Xerxes, and in his own brother Hystaspes. The former, and their adherents, he overthrew in a bloody battle; and in the following year obtained a complete victory over his brother, and totally subdued the Bactrians, who had espoused his cause: and thus rendered himself the undisputed possessor of the Persian empire. About his third year, which was 462 before Christ, the history of Esther begins, which, in its connection with the Persian history, is thus ably introduced by Dr. Prideaux: - "After Artaxerxes had obtained these successes, and thereby firmly settled himself in the peaceable possession of the whole Persian empire, (Esther 1), he appointed a solemn rejoicing on this account: and caused it to be celebrated in the city of Shushan, or Susa, in feasting and shows, for the term of a hundred and eighty days; on the conclusion of which he gave a great feast for all the princes and people that were then in Shushan, for seven days; and Vashti, the queen, at the same time, made a like feast in her apartment for the women. On the seventh day, the king's heart being merry with wine, he commanded the seven chamberlains to bring Queen Vashti before him, with the crown royal on her head, that he might show to the princes and people her beauty. But for her thus to show herself in such an assembly being contrary to the usage of the Persians, and appearing to her, as indeed it was, very indecent, and much unbecoming the modesty of a lady, as well as the dignity of her station, she refused to comply, and would not come; whereon the king, being very much incensed, called his seven counsellors to take advice with them about it, who, fearing this might be a bad example through the whole empire, in encouraging women to contemn and disobey their husbands, advised that the king should put Vashti away for ever from him, and give her royal state to another, that should be better than her; and by his royal edict, give command throughout the whole empire that all wives should pay honor and obedience to their husbands, and that every man should rule absolutely in his own house. Which advice pleasing the king, he commanded it accordingly to be put in execution; and Vashti never more after that came again into the king's presence: for the decree whereby she was removed from him was registered among the laws of the Medes and Persians, and therefore it could never again be altered. After this, orders were given out through the whole empire for the gathering together at the palace at Shushan all the fair virgins in every province, that out of them one might be chosen whom the king should best like to be made queen in her place. At the time when this collection of virgins was made, (Esther 2), there lived in Shushan a certain Jew named Mordecai, who was of the descendants of those who had been carried captive to Babylon with Jeconiah king of Judah, and, by his attendance at the king's gate, seems to have been one of the porters of the royal palace. He, having no children, did bring up Hadassah, his uncle's daughter, and adopted her as his own. This young woman, being very beautiful and fair, was made choice of among other virgins on this occasion; and was carried to the king's palace, and there committed to the care of Hege, the king's chamberlain, who was appointed to have the custody of these virgins; whom she pleased so well by her good carriage, that he showed her favor before all the other virgins under his care; and therefore he assigned her the best apartment of the house, and provided her first with those things that were requisite for her purification: for the custom was, that every virgin thus taken into the palace for the king's use was to go through a course of purification, by sweet oils and perfumes, for a whole year; and therefore Hadassah, having been, by the favor of the

chamberlain, of the earliest provided with these things, was one of the first that was prepared and made ready for the king's bed, and therefore was one of the soonest that was called to it. The term, therefore, of her purification being accomplished, her turn came to go in unto the king; who was so much pleased with her that he often called her by name, which he used not to do but to those only of his women whom he was much delighted with. Esther growing still farther in the king's favor, and gaining his affections beyond all the rest of the women, (Esther 2), he advanced her to higher honor; and on the tenth day of the tenth month, which falls about the end of our year, did put the royal diadem upon her head, and declared her queen in the place of Vashti; and in consequence thereof, made a solemn feast for his princes and servants, which was called Esther's feast; and, in honor of her, at the same time made a release of taxes to the provinces, and gave donatives and presents to all that attended him, according to the grandeur and dignity of his royal estate. Haman, an Amalekite, of the posterity of Agag, who was king of Amalek, in the time of Saul, growing to be the chief favourite of King Artaxerxes, all the king's servants were commanded to pay reverence unto him, and bow before him; and all of them obeyed the king's order but Mordecai the Jew, who, sitting in the king's gate, according to his office, paid not any reverence to Haman at such times as he passed by into the palace, neither bowed he at all to him; at which, being told, he was exceedingly displeased: but scorning to lay hands on one man only, and being informed that he was a Jew, he resolved, in revenge of this affront, to destroy, not only him, but also his whole nation with him; and to this act he was not a little excited by the ancient enmity which was between them and the people of whom he was descended; and therefore, for the accomplishing of this design, on the first day of the first month, that is, in the month Nisan, he called together his diviners, to find out what day would be the most fortunate for the putting this plan into execution: and they having, according to the manner of divination then in use among those Eastern people, cast lots first upon each month, did thereby determine for the thirteenth day of the twelfth month following, called Adar, as the day which they judged would be the most lucky for the accomplishing of what he purposed: whereon he forthwith went in unto the king; and having insinuated to him that there was a certain people dispersed all over his empire who did not keep the king's laws, but followed laws of their own, diverse from the laws of all other people, to the disturbance of the good order of his kingdom, and the breach of that uniformity whereby it ought to be governed; and that, therefore, it was not for the king's profit that they should any longer be suffered; he proposed, and gave counsel that they should be all destroyed and extirpated out of the whole empire of Persia; and urged it as that which was necessary for the establishing of the peace and good order of his government: to which having gained the king's consent, and an order that on the thirteenth day of Adar following, according as was determined by the divination of the lots, it should be put in execution, he called the king's scribes together to write the decree; and it being drawn as he proposed, on the thirteenth day of the same month of Nisan copies thereof were written out, and sent into all the provinces of the empire, commanding the king's lieutenants, governors, and all other his officers in every one of them, to destroy, kill, and cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of Adar following; and to take the spoil of them for a prey: which day was full eleven months after the date of the decree. The lot which seems to have pointed out that day appears to have been directed by the special providence of God, that so long a space intervening, there might be time enough to take such measures as should be proper to prevent the mischief intended. It is hard to find a reason for Mordecai's refusing to pay his respect to Haman, which may be sufficient to excuse him for thus exposing himself and all his nation to that destruction which it had like to have drawn upon them. That which is commonly said is, that it was the same adoration which was made to the king of Persia; and that, consisting in the bowing of the knee, and the prostration of the whole body to the ground, it was avoided by Mordecai, upon a notion which he had of its being idolatrous: but this being the common compliment paid to the kings of Persia, by all

that were admitted into their presence, it was no doubt paid to this very king by Ezra and Nehemiah, when they had access to him, and after also by Mordecai himself; for otherwise he could not have obtained that admission into his presence, and that advancement in his palace, which was afterwards there granted unto him; and if it were not idolatrous to pay this adoration to the king, neither was it idolatrous to pay it to Haman. The Greeks would not pay this respect to the kings of Persia out of pride; and excepting Themistocles, and two or three others, none of them could ever be brought to it. I will not say that this was the case with Mordecai in respect to Haman: it seems most probable that it was from a cause that was personal in Haman only. Perhaps it was because Haman, being of the race of the Amalekites, he looked upon him as under the curse which God had denounced against that nation; and therefore thought himself obliged not to give that honor to him. And if all the rest of the Jews thought the same, this might seem reason enough to him to extend his wrath against the whole nation, and to meditate the destruction of them all in revenge. But whatever was the cause that induced Mordecai to refuse the payment of this respect to the king's favourite, this provoked that favourite to procure the decree above mentioned, for the utter extirpation of the whole Jewish nation in revenge for it. When Mordecai heard of this decree, he made great lamentation, as did also all the Jews of Shushan with him; and therefore, putting on sackcloth, he sat in this mournful garb without the king's gate, (for he would not be allowed to enter within it in that dress), which being told Esther, she sent to him to know what the matter was. Whereon Mordecai acquainted her with the whole state of the case; and sent her a copy of the decree, that she might fully see the mischief that was intended her people; to absolutely destroy them, and root them out from the face of the earth: and therefore commanded her forthwith to go in unto the king and make supplication for them. At first she excused herself, because of the law, whereby it was ordained that whosoever, whether man or woman, should come in unto the king in the inner court who was not called for, should be put to death, excepting such only to whom the king should hold out the golden scepter in his hand that he might live; and she was afraid of hazarding her life in this cause. Whereon Mordecai, sending to her, again told her, that the decree extended universally to all of her nation, without any exception, and that, if it came to execution, she must not expect to escape more than any other of her people; that Providence seemed to have advanced her on purpose for this work; but if she refused to act her part in it, then deliverance should come some other way, and she and her father's house should perish; for he was fully persuaded that God would not suffer his people to be thus totally destroyed. "Whereon Esther, resolving to put her life on the hazard for the safety of her people, desired Mordecai that he and all the Jews then in Shushan should fast three days for her, and offer up prayer and humble supplication that God would prosper her in the undertaking: which being accordingly done, on the third day Esther put on her royal apparel and went in unto the king, while he was sitting upon his throne in the inner part of his palace. And as soon as he saw her standing in the court he showed favor unto her, and held out his golden scepter; and Esther, going near and touching the top of it, had thereby her life secured unto her: and when the king asked her what her petition was, at first she only desired that he and Haman would come to a banquet which she had prepared for him. "And when Haman was called, and the king and he were at the banquet, he asked her again of her petition, promising it should be granted her to the half of his kingdom: but then she desired only that the king and Haman should come again to the like banquet on the next day, intimating that she would then make known her request unto him. Her intention in claiming thus to entertain the king twice at her banquet before she made known her petition unto him was, that thereby she might the more endear herself unto him, and dispose him the better to grant the request which she had to make unto him. "Haman, being proud of the honor of being thus admitted alone with the king to the queen's banquet, went home to his house much puffed up: but on his return thither, seeing Mordecai sitting at the gate of the palace, and still refusing to bow unto him; this moved his

indignation to such a degree, that on his coming to his house, and calling his friends about him to relate to them the great honor that was done to him by the king and queen, and the high advancement which he had obtained in the kingdom, he could not forbear complaining of the disrespect and affront that was offered him by Mordecai. Whereon they advised him to cause a gallows to be built of fifty cubits in height, and next morning to ask the king to have Mordecai hanged thereon: and accordingly he ordered the gallows immediately to be made; and went early the next morning to the palace, for the obtaining of the grant from the king to have Mordecai hanged on it. But that morning the king awaking sooner than ordinary, and not being able to compose himself again to sleep, he called for the book of the records and chronicles of the kingdom, and caused them to be read unto him; wherein finding an account of the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh, and that it was discovered by Mordecai the Jew, the king inquired what honor had been done to him for the same. And being told that nothing had been done for him, he inquired who was in the court; and being told that Haman was standing there, he ordered him to be called in, and asked of him what should be done to the man whom the king delighted to honor: whereon Haman, thinking this honor was intended for himself, gave advice that the royal apparel should be brought which the king used to wear, and the horse which he kept for his own riding, and the crown which used to be set upon his head; and that this apparel and horse should be delivered into the hands of one of the king's most noble princes, that he might array therewith the man whom the king delighted to honor, and bring him on horseback through the whole city, and proclaim before him 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delighteth to honor.' Whereon the king commanded him forthwith to take the apparel and horse, and do this to Mordecai the Jew, who sat in the king's gate, in reward for his discovery of the treason of the two eunuchs: all which Haman having been forced to do in obedience to the king's command, he returned with great sorrow to his house, lamenting the disappointment and great mortification he had met with in being thus forced to pay such signal honor to his enemy, whom he had intended to have hanged on the gallows which he had provided for him. And on his relating this to his friends, they all told him, that if this Mordecai were of the seed of the Jews, this bad omen foreboded that he should not prevail against them, but should surely fall before him. While they were thus talking, one of the queen's chamberlains came to Haman's house to hasten him to the banquet: and seeing the gallows which had been set up the night before, fully informed himself of the intent for which it was prepared. On the king's and Haman's sitting down to the banquet, the king asked again of Esther what was her petition, with like promise that it should be granted to her to the half of his kingdom: whereon she humbly prayed the king that her life might be given her on her petition, and her people at her request; for that a design was laid for the destruction of her and all her kindred and nation. At which the king asking, with much anger, who it was that durst do this thing, she told him that Haman then present was the author of the wicked plot; and laid the whole of it open to the king. Whereon the king rose up with much wrath from the banquet, and walked out into the garden adjoining; which Haman perceiving, he fell down before the queen upon the bed on which she was sitting, to supplicate for his life; in which posture the king having found him upon his return, spoke out in great passion, What, will he force the queen before me in the house? At which words the servants present immediately covered his face, as was then the usage to condemned persons; and the chamberlain, who had that day called Haman to the banquet, acquainting the king with the gallows he saw in his house there prepared for Mordecai, who had saved the king's life in detecting the treason of the two eunuchs, the king ordered that he should be forthwith hanged thereon, which was accordingly done; and all his house, goods, and riches, were given to Queen Esther; and she appointed Mordecai to be her steward to manage the same. On the same day the queen made the king acquainted with the relation which Mordecai had unto her; whereon the king took him into his favor, and advanced him to great power, riches, and dignity in the empire; and made him the keeper of his signet, in the same

manner as Haman had been before. But still the decree for the destruction of the Jews remaining in its full force, the queen petitioned the king a second time to put away this mischief from them; but, according to the laws of the Medes and Persians, nothing being to be reversed which had been decreed and written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's seal, and the decree procured by Haman against the Jews having been thus written and sealed, it could not be recalled. All therefore that the king could do, in compliance with her request, was, to give the Jews, by a new decrees such a power to defend themselves against such as should assault them, as might render the former decree ineffectual: and for that end he bid Esther and Mordecai draw such a decree in words as strong as could be devised, that so the former might be hindered from being executed, though it could not be annulled. And therefore the king's scribes being again called on the twenty-third day of the third month, a new decree was drawn just two months and ten days after the former; wherein the king granted to the Jews, which were in every city of the Persian empire, full license to gather themselves together and stand for their lives; and to destroy, slay, and cause to perish, all the power of the people and province that should assault them, with their little ones and women, and to take the spoil of them for a prey. And this decree being written in the king's hand, and sealed with his seal, copies thereof were drawn out, and especial messengers were despatched with them into all the provinces of the empire. "The thirteenth day of Adar drawing near, when the decree obtained by Haman for the destruction of the Jews was to be put into execution, their adversaries everywhere prepared to act against them, according to the contents of it: and the Jews, on the other hand, by virtue of the second decree which was obtained in their favor, by Esther and Mordecai, gathered themselves together in every city where they dwelt, throughout all the provinces of King Artaxerxes, to provide for their safety: so that on the said thirteenth of Adar, through the means of these two different and discordant decrees, a war was commenced between the Jews and their enemies throughout the whole Persian empire. But the rulers of the provinces, and the lieutenants, the deputies, and the other officers of the king, knowing with what power Esther and Mordecai were then invested, through fear of them so favored the Jews, that they prevailed everywhere against those that rose against them; and on that day, throughout the whole empire, slew of their enemies seven thousand five hundred persons; and in the city of Shushan, on that day and the next, eight hundred more; among whom were the ten sons of Haman, whom by a special order from the king they caused all to be hanged; perhaps upon the same gallows on which Haman, their father, had been hanged before. These transactions took place in the thirteenth year of Artaxerxes, about four hundred and fifty-two years before Christ." The reader is requested to refer to the notes on all these passages. "The Jews, being delivered thus from this dangerous design which threatened them with nothing less than total extirpation, made great rejoicings for it on the two days following, that is, on the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the said month Adar: and by the order of Esther and Mordecai these two days, with the thirteenth that preceded them, were set apart, and consecrated to be annually observed for ever after in commemoration thereof; the thirteenth as a fast, because of the destruction on that day intended to have been brought upon them, and the other two as a feast because of their deliverance from it; and both this fast and feast they constantly observe every year on those days, even to this time. The fast they call the fast of Esther; and the feast, the feast of Purim, from the Persian word Purim, which signifies lots; because it was by the casting of lots that Haman did set out this time for their destruction. This feast is the Bacchanals of the Jews, which they celebrate with all manner of rejoicing, mirth, and jollity; and therein indulge themselves in all manner of luxurious excesses, especially in drinking wine, even to drunkenness; which they think part of the duty of the solemnity, because it was by means of the wine banquet, they say, that Esther made the king's heart merry, and brought him into that good humor which inclined him to grant the request which she made unto him for their deliverance; and therefore they think they ought to make their hearts merry also, when they celebrate the commemoration of it. During this

festival the book of Esther is solemnly read in all their synagogues from the beginning to the end; at which they are all to be present, men, women, children, and servants, because all these had their part in this deliverance which Esther obtained for them. And as often as the name of Haman occurs in the reading of this book, the usage is for them all to clap with their hands, and stamp with their feet, and cry out: Let his memory perish. "This is the last feast of the year among them, for the next that follows is the Passover, which always falls in the middle of the month, which begins the Jewish year."

Ahasuerus makes royal feasts for his nobles and people, Est 1:1-9. Vashti is sent for by the king, but refuses to come, Est 1:10-12. Vashti is disgraced; and a law made for the subjection of women, Est 1:13-22.

The whole history of this book in its connected order, with the occurrences in the Persian empire at that time, will be found in the introduction: to which the reader is referred.

Concerning the author of this book there are several opinions: some attribute the work to Ezra; some to one Joachim, a high priest; others, to the men of the Great Synagogue; and others to Mordecai. This latter is the most likely opinion: nor is that to be disregarded which gives to Mordecai for co-partner Ezra himself; though it is likely that the conclusion, from Est 9:23 to the end of the book, was inserted by another hand, and at a later time. Though some Christians have hesitated to receive the book of Esther into the sacred canon; yet it has always been received by the Jews, not only as perfectly authentic, but also as one of the most excellent of their sacred books. They call it מגילה megillah, The Volume, by way of eminence; and hold it in the highest estimation. That it records the history of a real fact, the observation of the feast of Purim, to the present day, is a sufficient evidence. Indeed, this is one of the strongest evidences that any fact can have, viz., that, to commemorate it, a certain rite, procession, feast, or the like, should have been instituted at the time, which, without intermission, has been continued annually through every generation of that people, and in whatsoever place they or parties of them may have sojourned, to the present day. This is the fact concerning the feast of Purim here mentioned; which the Jews, in all places of their dispersion, have uninterruptedly celebrated, and do still continue to celebrate, from the time of their deliverance from the massacre intended by Haman to the present time. Copies of this book, widely differing from each other, exist in Hebrew, Chaldee, Syriac, Greek, and Latin. All these differ much from the Hebrew text, particularly the Greek and the Chaldee: the former has many additional paragraphs; and the latter, as it exists in the London Polyglot, contains five times more than the Hebrew text. To notice all the various readings, additions, and paraphrases, in the above copies, would require a volume of no inconsiderable magnitude. The reader who is curious may consult the above Polyglot. This book does not appear to be extant in Arabic, or in any other of the Oriental languages, besides the Hebrew and Syriac.

The question may naturally arise, What was the original of this book? or, In what language was it written? Though learned men in general decide in favor of a Hebrew original, yet there are many reasons which might be urged in favor of the Persian. Several of the proper names are evidently of a Persian origin; and no doubt all the others are so; but they are so transformed by passing through the Hebrew, that they are no longer discernible. The Hebrew has even retained some of the Persian words, having done little else than alter the character, e.g., Esther, Mehuman, Mishak, Melzar, Vashti, Shushan, Pur, Darius, Paradise, etc., several of which will be noted in their proper places. The Targum in the London Polyglot is widely different from that in the Complutum, Antwerp, and Paris editions. The principal additions in the Greek are carefully marked in the London Polyglot, but are too long and too numerous to be inserted here. It is a singular circumstance that the name of God does not once occur in the whole of this book as it stands in Hebrew.

Verse 1

Now it came to pass - The Ahasuerus of the Romans, the Artaxerxes of the Greeks and Ardsheer of the Persians, are the same. Some think that this Ahasuerus was Darius, the son of Hystaspes; but Prideaux and others maintain that he was Artaxerxes Longimanus.

Reigned from India even unto Ethiopia - This is nearly the same account that is given by Xenophon. How great and glorious the kingdom of Cyrus was beyond all the kingdoms of Asia, was evident from this: Ὀρισθη μεν πρως ἐω τη Ερυθρα θαλαττη· προς αρκτον δε τω Ευξεινω ποντω· προς ἐσπεραν δε Κυπρω και Αιγυπτω· προς μεσημβριαν δε Αιθιοπια. "It was bounded on the east by the Red Sea; on the north by the Euxine Sea; on the west by Cyprus and Egypt; and on the south by Ethiopia." - Cyrop. lib. viii., p. 241, edit. Steph. 1581.

ESTHER 1: 2 in those days, when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom, which was in Shushan the palace,

Verse 2

Sat on the throne of his kingdom - Having subdued all his enemies, and brought universal peace to his empire. See the commencement of the introduction.

Shushan the palace - The ancient city of Susa, now called Shuster by the Persians. This, with Ecbatana and Babylon, was a residence of the Persian kings. The word הבירה habbirah, which we render the palace, should be rendered the city, εν Σουσοις τη πολει, as in the Septuagint.

ESTHER 1: 3 in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and his servants; the power of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him.

ESTHER 1: 4 He displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even one hundred eighty days.

Verse 4

The riches of his glorious kingdom - Luxury was the characteristic of the Eastern monarchs, and particularly of the Persians. In their feasts, which were superb and of long continuance, they made a general exhibition of their wealth, grandeur, etc., and received the highest encomiums from their poets and flatterers. Their ostentation on such occasions passed into a proverb: hence Horace: -

Persicos odi, puer, apparatus:

Displicent nexae philyra coronae;

Mitte sectari, rosa quo locorum

Sera moretur.

I tell thee, boy, that I detest

The grandeur of a Persian feast;

Nor for me the linden's rind
Shall the flowery chaplet bind.
Then search not where the curious rose
Beyond his season loitering grows.
Francis.

ESTHER 1: 5 When these days were fulfilled, the king made a seven day feast for all the people who were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.

Verse 5

A feast unto all the people - The first was a feast for the nobles in general; this, for the people of the city at large.

In the court of the garden - As the company was very numerous that was to be received, no apartments in the palace could be capable of containing them; therefore the court of the garden was chosen.

ESTHER 1: 6 There were hangings of white, green, and blue material, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. The couches were of gold and silver, on a pavement of red, white, yellow, and black marble.

Verse 6

White, green, and blue hangings - It was customary, on such occasions, not only to hang the place about with elegant curtains of the above colors, as Dr. Shaw and others have remarked, but also to have a canopy of rich stuffs suspended on cords from side to side of the place in which they feasted. And such courts were ordinarily paved with different coloured marbles, or with tiles painted, as above specified. And this was the origin of the Musive or Mosaic work, well known among the Asiatics, and borrowed from them by the Greeks and the Romans.

The beds of gold and silver mentioned here were the couches covered with gold and silver cloth, on which the guests reclined.

ESTHER 1: 7 They gave them drinks in golden vessels of various kinds, including royal wine in abundance, according to the bounty of the king.

Verse 7

Vessels being diverse - They had different services of plate.

ESTHER 1: 8 In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had instructed all the officials of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.

Verse 8

None did compel: for so the king had appointed - Every person drank what he pleased; he was not obliged to take more than he had reason to think would do him good.

Among the Greeks, each guest was obliged to keep the round, or leave the company: hence the proverb Η πιθι, η απιθι; Drink or begone. To this Horace refers, but gives more license: -

Pasco libatis dapibus; prout cuique libido est.

Siccat inaequales calices conviva, solutus

Legibus insanis: seu quis capit acria fortis

Pocula; seu modicis humescit aetius.

Horat. Sat. lib. ii., s. vi., ver. 67.

There, every guest may drink and fill

As much or little as he will;

Exempted from the Bedlam rules

Of roaring prodigals and fools.

Whether, in merry mood or whim,

He fills his goblet to the brim;

Or, better pleased to let it pass,

Is cheerful with a moderate glass.

Francis.

At the Roman feasts there was a person chosen by the cast of dice, who was the Arbiter bibendi, and prescribed rules to the company, which all were obliged to observe. References to this custom may be seen in the same poet. Odar. lib. i., Od. iv., ver. 18: -

Non regna vini sortiere talis.

And in lib. ii., Od. vii., ver. 25: - - Quem Venus arbitrum Dicet bibendi?

Mr. Herbert, in his excellent poem, The Church Porch, has five verses on this vile custom and its rule: -

Drink not the third glass, which thou canst not tame

When once it is within thee, but before

Mayst rule it as thou list; and pour the shame,

Which it would pour on thee, upon the floor.
It is most just to throw that on the ground,
Which would throw me there if I keep the round.
He that is drunken may his mother kill,
Big with his sister; he hath lost the reins;
Is outlawed by himself. All kinds of ill
Did with his liquor slide into his veins.
The drunkard forfeits man; and doth divest
All worldly right, save what he hath by beast.
Nothing too severe can be said on this destructive practice.

ESTHER 1: 9 Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Verse 9

Also Vashti the queen - Vashti is a mere Persian word; and signifies a beautiful or excellent woman.
Made a feast for the women - The king, having subdued all his enemies, left no competitor for the kingdom; and being thus quietly and firmly seated on the throne, made this a time of general festivity. As the women of the East never mingle with the men in public, Vashti made a feast for the Persian ladies by themselves; and while the men were in the court of the garden, the women were in the royal house.

ESTHER 1: 10 On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, and Abagtha, Zethar, and Carcass, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,

Verse 10

He commanded Mehuman - All these are doubtless Persian names; but so disguised by passing through a Hebrew medium, that some of them can scarcely be known. Mehuman signifies a stranger or guest.
We shall find other names and words in this book, the Persian etymology of which may be easily traced.

ESTHER 1: 11 to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was beautiful.

Verse 11

To bring Vashti the queen - The Targum adds naked.

For she was fair to look on - Hence she had her name Vashti, which signifies beautiful. See Est 1:9.

ESTHER 1: 12 But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the eunuchs. Therefore the king was very angry, and his anger burned in him.

Verse 12

Vashti refused to come - And much should she be commended for it. What woman, possessing even a common share of prudence and modesty, could consent to expose herself to the view of such a group of drunken Bacchanalians? Her courage was equal to her modesty: she would resist the royal mandate, rather than violate the rules of chaste decorum.

Her contempt of worldly grandeur, when brought in competition with what every modest woman holds dear and sacred, is worthy of observation. She well knew that this act of disobedience would cost her her crown, if not her life also: but she was regardless of both, as she conceived her virtue and honor were at stake.

Her humility was greatly evidenced in this refusal. She was beautiful; and might have shown herself to great advantage, and have had a fine opportunity of gratifying her vanity, if she had any: but she refused to come.

Hail, noble woman! be thou a pattern to all thy sex on every similar occasion! Surely, every thing considered, we have few women like Vashti; for some of the highest of the land will dress and deck themselves with the utmost splendor, even to the selvedge of their fortunes, to exhibit themselves at balls, plays, galas, operas, and public assemblies of all kinds, (nearly half naked), that they may be seen and admired of men, and even, to the endless reproach and broad suspicion of their honor and chastity, figure away in masquerades! Vashti must be considered at the top of her sex: -

Rara avis in terris, nigroque simillima cygno.

A black swan is not half so rare a bird.

ESTHER 1: 13 Then the king said to the wise men, who knew the times, (for it was the king's custom to consult those who knew law and judgement;

Verse 13

To the wise men - Probably the lawyers.

ESTHER 1: 14 and the next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom),

Verse 14

And the next unto him - the seven princes - Probably, the privy counsellors of the king. Which saw the king's face - were at all times admitted to the royal presence.

ESTHER 1: 15 "What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not done the bidding of the King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?"

ESTHER 1: 16 Memucan answered before the king and the princes, "Vashti the queen has not done wrong to just the king, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus.

Verse 16

Vashti - hath not done wrong to the king only - This reasoning or arguing was inconsequent and false. Vashti had not generally disobeyed the king, therefore she could be no precedent for the general conduct of the Persian women. She disobeyed only in one particular; and this, to serve a purpose, Memucan draws into a general consequence; and the rest came to the conclusion which he drew, being either too drunk to be able to discern right from wrong, or too intent on reducing the women to a state of vassalage, to neglect the present favorable opportunity.

ESTHER 1: 17 For this deed of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to show contempt for their husbands, when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she didn't come.'

ESTHER 1: 18 Today, the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's deed will tell all the king's princes. This will cause much contempt and wrath.

Verse 18

The ladies of Persia - שרות saroth, the princesses; but the meaning is very well expressed by our term ladies.

ESTHER 1: 19 "If it please the king, let a royal commandment go from him, and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be altered, that Vashti may never again come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she.

Verse 19

That it be not altered - Let it be inserted among the permanent laws, and made a part of the constitution of the empire. Perhaps the Persians affected such a degree of wisdom in the construction of their laws, that they never could be amended, and should never be repeated. And this we may understand to be the ground of the saying, The laws of the Medes and Persians, that change not.

ESTHER 1: 20 When the king's decree which he shall make is published throughout all his kingdom (for it is great), all the wives will give their husbands honour, both great and small."

ESTHER 1: 21 This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan:

ESTHER 1: 22 for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, that every man should rule his own house, speaking in the language of his own people.

Verse 22

That every man should bear rule in his own house - Both God's law and common sense taught this from the foundation of the world. And is it possible that this did not obtain in the Persian empire, previously to this edict? The twentieth verse has another clause, That all wives shall give to their husbands honor, both to great and small. This also was universally understood. This law did nothing. I suppose the parade of enactment was only made to deprive honest Vashti of her crown. The Targum adds, "That each woman should speak the language of her husband." If she were even a foreigner, she should be obliged to learn and speak the language of the king. Perhaps there might be some common sense in this, as it would oblige the foreigner to devote much time to study and improvement; and, consequently, to make her a better woman, and a better wife. But there is no proof that this was a part of the decree. But there are so many additions to this book in the principal versions, that we know not what might have made a part of it originally.