

THE HEROINES OF OUR ORDER

L. C. Dryden, Past Patron

ESTHER

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Must we perish, O my nation,
With the light of ages crowned?
Surely there is yet salvation
With our great Deliverer found;
Cry aloud then, Zion's daughter,
Rend with sorrowing groans the sky;
Blunt with prayer the sword of slaughter--
Haste, my people, ere we die!

Thou who shone our nation's glory,
Mark the time of deep distress;
Hear with pitying ear our story
See our anguish, Lord, and bless.
But if thus our sins to chasten
Thou refuse Thy children's cry,
All submissive, I will hasten
With my people, Lord, to die.

---Robert Morris

ESTHER
(From the Persian, Star)

Hadassah (Myrtle), a beautiful and high-born Jewish maiden, orphaned and stranded in exile, became the ward of her uncle Mordecai, who held a minor position in the court of Ahasuerus, King of Persia. To conceal her race and lineage she was given the Persian name of Esther and reared in obscurity. When, after the deposition of Queen Vashti, the beautiful maidens throughout the Empire were summoned to court to appear before the king, Esther's beauty could no longer be hidden, though the secret of her race was kept intact. The outcome of the contest for the king's favor is well-known. Esther, waiving personal choice of the prescribed cosmetics and other aids to artificial beauty, trusted all to the king's chamberlain; was chosen, wedded, and crowned Queen of Persia.

Haman, an Agagite and grand vizier to the king, had long spearheaded opposition to the Jews. His spleen was directed in particular against Mordecai. As the Jews grew in influence, though the queen's descent remained a carefully guarded secret between herself and Mordecai, Haman became more determined than ever to compass their destruction. On a pretext of loyalty to the king's every interest and of shielding him from the burdensome details of administration, Haman managed by artifice to secure his signature to a document decreeing their extermination.

When word of this dastardly plot came to the ears of Mordecai, he brought the news with swift and secret steps to the closet of the queen. He besought her to go boldly to the king and intercede for her people. Astounded by the news and shrinking from the audacity of the proposed

venture, she at first refused. Let those who would make light of the risk she would run, being crowned queen, remember another queen, probably as beautiful in her day and of the same heroic mould, who had been deposed and hurried into seclusion for an issue of far less weight, nine years before. In six years, Esther's youthful beauty, too, had doubtless begun to fade. Six years is a long time for Oriental beauty to remain fresh and blooming, in the eyes of such a connoisseur of beauty as an Oriental despot is likely to be.

Then there was the imminent danger that Esther, in pleading for her people would divulge her kinship to them. Whereupon the nine-year-old king, in a moment of capricious rage, might doom them all to swift and bloody death. But Mordecai, with desperate determination, pressed the issue. "Think not that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" After one final moment of tortured indecision, the tender and long-sheltered queen made her resolve: "Fast ye for me these three days, and I and my maidens will fast likewise; and so will I go in unbidden unto the king, which is not according to law: and if I perish, I perish".

Meanwhile the king, being wakeful one night, commanded that the annals of the empire be brought and read to him. However dull and sleep-inducing such records might usually prove to be, the reader came upon one entry that brought the king broad awake. Mordecai the Jew, some

months before, had exposed and foiled a plot against the life of the king. Moreover, no reward had been given him and his service in the matter seemed thus far to have been forgotten. This timely discovery prepared the mind of the king for favorable attitude toward the Jews when Queen Esther should come before him.

The Greek version tells us that when the crucial moment came she swooned in terror and that the king revived her with a kiss of tenderness and freely granted her request. Haman's perfidy was uncovered in a dramatic scene; he was seized and hustled forth to be hanged on the gallows he had caused to be erected for Mordecai; the Jews were vindicated and permitted to take vengeance on their enemies. The day of their deliverance inaugurated the Feast of Purim, which is observed by pious Jews to the present day, in honor of the noble Queen Esther who risked her crown and life to save her people from destruction.